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CHRISTIANITY AND COMMON LIFE

SERMONS

BY

REV. H. R. GAMBLE, M.A.

RECTOR OF UPPER CHELSEA

AUTHOR OF

"SUNDAY AND THE SABBATH" (GOLDEN LECTURES, 1900-1)
AND "TEN VIRGINS"

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P R E F A C E

THE title of this volume is suggested by the general nature of its contents, so far as they can be said to have a "general nature." The sermons which it contains were addressed, that is, not so much to the "religious," as to men and women living in the "world"—and one of their aims was to present the Christian religion as bearing upon the duties and interests of "common life."

H. R. G.

HOLY TRINITY,
SLOANE STREET, S.W.

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I

THE THINGS THAT MATTER

“Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?”—1 KINGS xxii. 39.

How lightly we pass over such a verse as this, and yet how full it is of meaning and significance! More than once in the books of the Kings we meet with the same expression—“Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and the might that he showed, are they not written in the chronicles of the kings of Israel?” “Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, and how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus and Hamath, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the Kings of Israel?” It must have seemed a strange way of summing up the reign of the great and successful Jeroboam. “His might, his wars, his victories,” these are passed with a single sentence, and dismissed almost as if they were, after all, but trivial things—as though

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when men "slept with their fathers" after life's fitful fever, these were not the things which mattered most.

"The garlands wither on your brows,
Then boast no more your mighty deeds !
Upon death's purple altar now
See where the victor-victim bleeds ;
Your head must come
To the cold tomb ;
Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet, and blossom in their dust."

And so with Ahab. Who can doubt that if Ahab had been asked for what he expected to be remembered after his death, it would have been for those very things that the sacred writer dismisses in this one sentence—"the ivory house that he made, the cities which he had built"? And who can doubt, too, that to the ordinary historian the reign of Ahab which we have come to regard as so infamous, would have appeared in an entirely different light? Ahab, from one point of view, might evidently have been regarded—and would have been regarded—as a wise and successful ruler. What could have been better, for instance, than his marriage to the Princess Jezebel? We know very well how the daily press of Samaria—if it had existed—would have spoken of the alliance. It would have pointed out the great commercial advantages likely to arise from it ; how, for instance, the corn, oil, and other agricultural products of Canaan would be exchanged for the commercial

products of the great mercantile ports of Phœnicia, and how it might fairly be expected that the royal marriage would be followed by a revival in trade. Then, again, how liberal and tolerant was the theology of Ahab! The conservative and old-fashioned elements of society—which subsequently found a mouthpiece in a fanatical preacher called Elijah—would contend for the absolute and unique supremacy of their ancient tribal deity, whom they called Jehovah; but Ahab was of a more enlarged mind. He would have argued that, after all, it is foolish to make too much of theological differences; that there were truths in all religions, and perhaps, falsehoods too; and that to refuse room for the cults of Baal and Ashtoreth would have been a grave breach of religious toleration. And so with Jezebel came a train, not only of courtiers, but of priests and priestesses, with rites that are better imagined than described. Nor was this all—Ahab was a successful warrior. There was war with Syria, the Syrians' forces closely investing Samaria. Benhadad, the Syrian king, sent insolent messages, which drew from Ahab the famous retort: "Let not him that putteth on his armour boast himself as he that putteth it off." Then Ahab, collecting his forces, inflicted on the Syrians a crushing blow, which he repeated, with even greater effect, in the following year. In addition to these things it seems clear that Ahab was a man of unusual

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magnificence of taste and conception. He displayed an interest in architecture, building, as we have seen, cities according to the fashion of the great kings of his time; while his palace in Jezreel, adorned with cedar and inlaid with ivory, must have been one of the wonders of the day. It was unfortunate that in the course of building it he should have come into contact with a cantankerous neighbour called Naboth, who unreasonably refused to sell his birthright. There was an episode in connexion with this attempted purchase which caused some little excitement in Jezreel at the time; but what of that? What historian can pause to recall those trifles in the reign of a king who had deserved so well of his country?

Such—can we doubt it?—would have been one account of the reign of Ahab, by no means an unfair description of it, by the pen of the ordinary chronicler of events; and if we want a proof of “the inspiration” of the Old Testament history, I do not think that we can find a better one than in the fact that to the writer of the Book of Kings the reign of Ahab appeared in such an entirely different light. To him, we may say, the great central fact of interest in the reign of Ahab is his treatment of Naboth the Jezreelite. We know the story. Naboth was a little man, perhaps, an obscure man, the owner of a vineyard, which his royal neighbour desired to annex. Naboth refused

to surrender the inheritance of his fathers. Then we have the vivid picture of Ahab and Jezebel—the weak husband “letting I dare not wait upon I would” the strong, determined wife; the plot by which Naboth was betrayed and slain; the king walking in his new possession only to meet the stern form of the prophet. It is on this—this great injustice, this great moral failure—that the eyes of the sacred historian are centred. This for him is the crucial interest in Ahab’s life. This is the act by which he is to be judged. *This* is the revelation of his character. We are not allowed to lose sight of it; it is not something to be buried or hurried away. It stands out, this glittering injustice, above and beyond all else; the rest, compared with this, mattered little. “The rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the Kings of Israel?” Let those read them who will, but there is another book in which the story of Naboth is written for ever. “Surely Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest ungodliness and wrong.”

We cannot, I think, recall this old story without being reminded once more how different lives may appear from what we may call the human and divine points of view. The method of the writer of the Book of Kings is not to give the full details

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of the days with which it deals, or the lives with which it is concerned, but rather to select from a mass of material certain events or incidents, and to point out their true and abiding significance for society or the individual. In writing, for instance, of the times of Ahab, he does not pause to deal with the commercial advantages arising from the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel. Doubtless they did arise, and they were not to be despised ; but from his eyes they fade away. He is intent on what seems to him a far more important matter—the moral results of their union ; the social and moral corruption resulting from contact with the impure rites of Baal and Ashtoreth ; and we sometimes wonder how it would be if a prophet were to apply such tests to our own day. I will not attempt to say what would be his judgment, but of this we may be quite certain, that he would judge our age not by the unparalleled material triumphs, the progress in wealth and luxury, the cities which it builds, or the palaces in Park Lane or elsewhere which it erects, but rather by such tests as the progress which we are making in purity of life, in the standards of commercial honour, in our care for the weak, in our anxiety to see that instead of sweated workers and sweated industries, all men and women should be paid a fair wage, in the growing sense of unity and brotherhood between rich and poor, in the softening rather than the

exaggeration of class distinctions. This is the difference between the mere chronicler and the true historian: the one may relate events; all that is brilliant and exciting, the wars and triumphs of the generation; the other looks below these things to find the forces and influences which are perhaps slowly changing, for better or for worse, the moral and spiritual ideals of the age; and often finding them in what might seem an insignificant incident.

And what is true of the age at large is true of each single life. We live, for instance, in a time in which biographies of great men—and sometimes of men who are not very great—are always appearing; and no form of literature can have a greater human interest. We know what are some of the characteristics—the ordinary characteristics—of these biographies: there is their great length; their amazing wealth of detail—one large volume, two, three volumes, hardly suffice to contain the masses of material that are at hand; all the acts of a man's life are chronicled in order; and there is the fond dwelling on the man's successes and triumphs, "the cities that he built and the ivory palace that he made"—"the might that he showed." No doubt this is partly inevitable, for the lives of failures are not written, at least, in this world. But if we can imagine such an inspired historian as the writer of the Kings doing the work, we cannot help

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wondering how he would do it. In the first place, we are quite sure he would considerably abbreviate these biographies ; and, in the next place, he would lay stress and significance on many things which the ordinary biographer omits or perhaps slurs over. Against the successes and triumphs, the "cities" and the "ivory palaces," he would, perhaps, pause awhile to select this or that apparently trivial incident which partly showed and partly determined the man's moral and spiritual history. Who can recall all those forgotten days in a man's life—the day when the politician was silent when he ought to have spoken ; the day when the priest shrank from the message he should have delivered ; the day when the merchant prince stooped to a dishonour which he has almost forgotten now ; the day when the great pro-consul preferred policy to justice ?—and yet, perhaps, it was in those obscure and secret choices of good or evil that the real significance of the man's life lay, and by which he is judged in the sight of God, when the world is speaking only of his might—of the battles he fought, of the victories he won, of the cities which he built, and the ivory palaces which he made, and all that is recorded in the chronicles of his day.

And finally, let us find here, each one of us, a thought and a warning for ourselves. There are three points of view from which our lives can be

regarded: (1) There is our own estimate of ourselves. What are the standards by which we judge ourselves? Are they simply the standards of the society to which we belong? So much is expected of us; so much, perhaps, in decency of life and conduct; and it is not difficult considering what those standards are, what, in fact, they must be, to attain to a considerable measure of self-satisfaction; or (2) there is the judgment of ourselves by others. We cannot, we ought not to be indifferent to this consideration: but after all, it cannot go very deep. People are very good-natured, as a rule; they do not require or expect too much from us. No doubt there are censorious critics, but we do not hear very much of them; alas! it is not the censoriousness, but the kindness of our friends, in which the chief danger lies: did Ahab fall below the requirements of his day? On the contrary, we may be quite sure that he would have passed as a good king; and (3) finally, there is the judgment of ourselves by God; and the life of Ahab as recorded in the Book of Kings, tells us this very clearly, if we will only listen to the message, that when we "sleep with our fathers," it is not by the cities we have built, or by the ivory palaces which we have made, that we shall be judged at the last—but by our secret choices, by our fidelity in small things, by our hidden and obscure loyalties or disloyalties to God and man. We do not

realize these things now—we are in the midst of life. We are hurried on by our interests, or our passions, or our ambitions—but there will come a time

“When the hurly-burly’s done,
When the battle’s lost and won,”

in which, perhaps, we shall see ourselves, and many other things in a new, strange light—and then it may be that some of the great things in our lives will seem to be very small—and some of the small things, as we thought them, very great—and after the glare and the tumult there will be the calm of a great silence; and in that silence we shall listen, like our first father, for “the voice of the Lord God,” speaking in the cool of the evening, at the close of the day.

II

ILLUSIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

“Let your moderation be known unto all men ; the Lord is at hand.”—PHIL. iv. 4.

It has often been said—and, no doubt, justly—that one mark of the Old Testament Scriptures, and especially of the prophets, is a perpetual expectation. Many nations idealize their past ; they look back to days of real or supposed glory ; but Israel always looked forward. “The day of the Lord” was always coming. “The Lord was at hand.” In the lowest fortunes of the people—when the sparks of national life seemed in danger of utter extinction—there arose some prophet to stir the slumbering embers and kindle the expiring flame. It was only gradually that out of all these hopes and expectations there issued a single figure, sublime, majestic—not the less majestic and sublime because now and then athwart his face there fell the shadow of a great agony—the figure of a King—a Conqueror—a scion of the House of David—“Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty Lord,

the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." That figure was often very dim in its outlines, but gradually it came to be associated with a "far off, divine event," which should result in the subjection, or sometimes, the conversion of the heathen—when the nations should flow into the Holy City, and the law should go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

In all these high expectations there were mingled large elements of error and illusion. Without the golden haze of illusion it is not possible that the hopes and dreams of the people could ever have been maintained. And God did not disappoint His people. The day of the Lord came: the Lord was at hand—but not, not as they expected it. A new era in the history of the world began, as they believed it would. But when the Kingdom of God came, it was without observation; and the mighty expectation of many centuries ended in "a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

And as with the Prophets of the Old Testament, so with the Apostles of the New. Their eyes, too, were fixed on the future—on what they called the "coming of Christ"—with them, too, "The Lord was at hand!" And here, also, we notice the same mingling—the same necessary and inevitable mingling—of error and illusion. There can, I think, be no doubt (if we examine the language of the New Testament) that the early disciples and

apostles expected in their own day some great catastrophe—a visible appearing of the hidden Christ in the “clouds of heaven.” Their whole life was dominated by this expectation. At any moment the heaven might open, and the faithful be caught up to “meet the Lord in the air.” For had He not said He would come again to them? and how could He come but in some such fashion as this? We cannot doubt that this was the hope and belief of the earlier Christians; and we cannot doubt either that then, as ever, God was training them by illusion—giving them, indeed, all which He had promised, but not in the way that they expected it. Without some such illusion as this, it may be that the Christian Church could not have taken the first step in the long journey that lay before her.

How long St. Paul expected that the Lord would be at hand, in this particular way, it is difficult to say. But the difference between his earlier letters and the later is a marked one. The earlier are filled by the expectation of a great catastrophe; in the later he is engaged in settling and establishing the work which the Church is to do on earth. The raptures of the Epistles to the Thessalonians are exchanged for what we might almost call the commonplace and business-like directions to a Timothy or a Titus to establish elders in every city; or the minute directions as to the qualifications for the work of a deacon. And it is very

well worth noting, the kind of temper which he commends to his disciples—Τὸ ἐπιεικὲς—"Let your moderation be known unto all men." Moderation! what a tepid, uninspiring word! The word "moderation" has, indeed, been exchanged for "forbearance" in the Revised Version, but the difference between the two English words is not so very great. The Greek word—Τὸ ἐπιεικὲς—expresses the very opposite of all that is fanatical, overstrained, without any sense of proportion. It expresses that sense of "fitness" which was a characteristic of the Greek mind, with its perception of harmony and beauty. There is something to be noticed in the combination—the combination of ideas which, at first sight, appears to be opposed to or incompatible with one another—"Let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is at hand."

Here, then, I think, we may find some thoughts both for individuals and for the Church at large. The life of every Christian—so we seem to learn—should be a life of expectation. "The Lord is at hand"; a life lived in the belief that as we grow older, God will, through the teaching of life and experience, make Himself more and more known to us; an earnest and eager desire for fresh revelations of His will for each one of us, His power, and His love. It is no good sign—it is a sign of weakness—when men and women are

always looking backward—backward, for instance, to the days of their childhood. No doubt there was much in our childhood which was beautiful; but it is a beauty which is gone, and cannot be recovered. We are all familiar with Wordsworth's ode on "Intimations of Immortality," the picture of childhood "apparelled with celestial light"; the mournful description of the "shades of the prison-house" closing upon the boy; the gradual obscuring of the "vision splendid," until, at last, "the man perceives it die away, and fade into the light of common day."

But, indeed, this is not only what life is, but in a certain sense also, what it ought to be. We can most of us dimly remember the illusions of our childhood or boyhood. They were illusions, yet we may well believe they were divine. If, as children, we could have seen the world, if we could have seen life as it really is, or as it appears to most people, not "apparelled in celestial light," we could hardly have set out so joyously upon the journey that lay before us. But just as for St. Paul the early rapturous expectation of a great "coming of Christ" in his own day, in the clouds of heaven, gradually faded into the commonplace duties of arranging the disputes of the Corinthian Christians, or appointing "deacons and elders," and giving directions about their ordinary and unexciting work, so we must all of us exchange the

poetry of childhood for the prose of middle life; the dreams and illusions of the early morning for the steady trudge and common toil of the afternoon. But just as the Apostle gradually learned that this was God's way and God's will for him and for the world, that the coming of Christ was not any sudden and wonderful catastrophe, but the gradual filling of the world by His Spirit, the setting up of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, so also it may be given to us, if we have faith in God, to seek Christ in the common round and daily task; and more and more to find our lives formed by Him. 'This is the work that lies before most of us; this is the expectation which ought to possess us. "The Lord is at hand." He is with us in our work, in our joys and sorrows, and if only we can believe this, if only we can "wait for Him," life need not be less divine than it used to be. And the temper of this life is, as St. Paul says, *Tò ἐπιεικὲς*—"moderation, forbearance." It is not a perpetual excitement; it is not restless, or noisy, or feverish; but a calm and quiet "expectation" that as we grow older we shall know God better, that "the Lord will be at hand"; that we shall more and more be filled with His Spirit, and in the fulness of His Spirit find our rest.

And the thought is not one for us merely as individuals. It is for the Christian body, for the Church at large. The temper which St. Paul

advises is that of expectation—"The Lord is at hand"—but also of "moderation." As I have said before, there is something about the word "moderation" which is not very inspiring. The "moderate" man is one whom we think of as a man of flabby convictions, who dares nothing for fear of making mistakes, and therefore does nothing. The "moderate" temper in the Church is associated in our minds with the eighteenth century and its dread of enthusiasm—a temper summed up in the epitaph of one of the Bishops who lies buried in Exeter Cathedral, "He was a firm enemy of all enthusiasm." And no doubt there have been, and may be, times when "moderation" or "forbearance" is only another name for "indifference"; but it need not be so. History, on the whole, seems to tell us that times of high religious excitement have not on the whole been most favourable to the growth of the Kingdom. There is now in Wales (as one gathers from the papers) a religious movement of a very remarkable character. A young miner, who has seen visions of his own, is conducting a series of services with extraordinary results. The people who hear him are possessed with amazing excitement. The contagion seems to spread like wildfire. Nor are results of a tangible kind lacking. In many places we are told, the public-houses are almost deserted. Men are inebriated by a high enthusiasm. It is

impossible not to feel a sympathetic interest in a movement of this sort ; but it is impossible also, I think, to put much confidence in it. It reminds one, in some respects (if one may rashly venture on an historical parallel) of the wonderful excitement which possessed Florence under the influence of the preaching of Savonarola. Then, as you will remember, the whole city was moved. Boys ran about in gangs demanding "vanities" to be destroyed. Women brought their jewels and cast them into the fires. The city formally adopted and elected Christ as their king. Visitors to Florence who now see over the Palazzo Vecchio the inscription, "Jesus Christus Rex Regum et Dominus Dominantium," will remember that, before it was altered by Cosimo I., it ran, "Jesus Christus Rex Florentini populi s. p. decreto electus." But the excitement was followed by a great reaction. The city, which had almost worshipped Savonarola, allowed him to be burnt by Alexander VI. The people who had cried, "The Lord was at hand," settled into an indifference not less profound than that from which they had once been roused.

Such movements as these have, indeed, their value, but it is a limited one. It is something, no doubt, for wicked, or worldly, or indifferent men to be touched in their spirit by a new enthusiasm ; and if the enthusiasm lifts them for a moment to

a higher level of life, there is at least a chance of their remaining on it. The danger lies in trying to live upon emotion, to keep it up, to stimulate it; and when that is found in the long run impossible, then to fall back unto the old level, or, perhaps, to a "last state that is worse than the first." The spirit of fanaticism is not one which in the long run elevates religion or promotes the growth of the kingdom of God. What we have to do is to remember both parts of St. Paul's admonition, "Let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is at hand." If we remember the first without the second, we shall sink into mere indifference; if we remember the second without the first, we shall, or may become vulgar fanatics. It is the combination which we need—the quiet temper, which instead of sinking into lethargy, is ever looking for and expecting some "coming of Christ." The Church has survived many of her illusions. God has not broken His promise, but He has been fulfilling it in His own way. She still looks forward to a "far off divine event to which the whole creation moves," but she has learnt to expect Christ and to see His coming, not so much in any great and sudden change, in any mighty catastrophe or revolution, as in the gradual possession of the "kingdom of this world" by His spirit and His power. You and I, my brethren, may very often be disappointed. We

see the sins and failures of society in our own day. We see bloody, relentless wars. We see "roaring London, raving Paris," with all their crimes and horrors and miseries. But the day of the Lord is a thousand years; and as we look back upon the nineteen centuries of Christian history, I do not see, in spite of all the failures, how we can doubt that Christ has been always coming. Now, indeed, as of old, He has often come unto His own and His own have received Him not, but when His spirit and power have been allowed to work, He has been slowly but surely changing the hearts and thoughts of men, and transforming the organism of human society: and in our own day, for all who have eyes to see, there is very sufficient evidence that "the Lord is at hand."

"The Lord is at hand." It is with special meaning that we say these words this morning.¹ Once more the time draws near the birth of Christ. Once more we prepare to celebrate the Christmas festival. It is very well that we should do so; but, as we do so, it must not be merely looking backward with a great "expectation." "The Lord is at hand"; yes, indeed, He is always coming; and we must pray and hope and expect that the bells at Christmas may not only recall the manger of Bethlehem, but may also, more and more as the years roll by, "ring in the Christ that is to be."

¹ The fourth Sunday in Advent.

III

HEARING AND SPEAKING

“Let every man be swift to hear ; slow to speak.”—
ST. JAS. i. 19.

HERE is some very homely advice, and it comes from a very homely Epistle. The Epistle of St. James has often been treated in a rather scornful fashion. It was, Luther declared, an “Epistle of straw.” No doubt, the eager monk, seeking peace for his soul and crying like Job of old, “How can a man be just before God?” found no satisfaction here for his passionate questionings. “There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit.” St. James was not a St. Paul ; he had not the “gifts” which enabled the latter to mould and colour Christian theology, but we do not doubt that it is the same Spirit who inspires his clear and simple and practical letter. The Church wants her St. James as well as her St. Paul, and we need not disdain this morning to listen again for a few minutes to one of the counsels of the “Brother of the Lord.”

“Let every man be swift to hear ; slow to speak.”

The writer is speaking especially of a way in which men are to build up their own characters, by which they are to save their own souls. And the first qualification, he says, is humility and reverence ; they are to be " swift to hear," eager to receive the word—to hold it, to meditate upon it, in silence and secrecy ; to try and test its power in their own inner life rather than to be in a hurry to air their own opinions.

" Be swift to hear," and, as our Lord says elsewhere, " Take heed how ye hear." Perhaps we might in the first place venture to apply this advice to the listening to sermons. There are, indeed, those by whom such advice will be at once rejected. There are those in the West of London—though not in the poorer, and in this respect more refined regions—who habitually leave the church when the preacher enters the pulpit. It is only charitable to assume that they are the most learned and pious part of the congregation who are quite sure that neither spiritually nor intellectually can a sermon be of any use to them. Perhaps they are right ; yet we might beg even these to remain in their places lest their example might affect some, less learned and pious, who might be in need of an assistance with which they can dispense. But passing over this minute and select portion of the congregation, let me for a moment appeal to those who do not feel that to get some good out of a

sermon is an entirely hopeless thing. It must, of course, frankly be admitted that many, perhaps most, sermons are somewhat dry and dull, but what I would urge is that the value, even of the best discourses, lies in the way in which they are listened to. A great statesman, who died a few years ago, listened, I believe, to two sermons on a Sunday for almost all his life, and though he must have heard a good many dull ones, he very rarely, as I understood, complained of their dulness. It is, my brethren, one of the advantages of humility that, stooping as it does in lowly fashion, it is able to find jewels even in the homiletical dustheaps which we present to you week after week; it seeks and therefore finds what scornful and conceited listeners never find. They rather tend to invert the advice of St. James; they are "slow to hear" and "swift to speak." They are strong as critics, and sermons to them are usually exposed to the charge of dulness. But even so, I would remind you once again that the dulness of a sermon often depends quite as much on the hearers as on the preachers. May it not be that sermons are dull to them because they are not interested in the subject with which sermons deal, because their spiritual faculties are dull and blunted? At any rate this is what we have a right to ask, that those who criticize will also pray for us. I believe, with all my heart, that a preacher may be borne up, not

only by his own prayers, but also by the prayers of his people; that by this means there may be created—if I may use the expression—a sort of electric current of sympathy along which the message from the pulpit may be flashed with great power into some minds and hearts. I assure you that the preacher, unless he is very young or conceited, is quite as much alive to his defects as the congregation. He laments quite as bitterly—perhaps far more so—that his weak hands cannot draw the bow of Apostles and Evangelists; and yet even to him sometimes it is given to shoot an arrow which may touch some heart or pierce some conscience. And at any rate there is one good which every kind and humble listener may obtain from a sermon—that which George Herbert pointed out long ago—

“If all lack sense
God takes the text and preacheth patience.”

Of course, I do not deny for a moment that the laity of the English Church are in this respect probably more severely tried than those of any other communion, and that, on the whole, they bear their trials with great good humour. The English Church lays more stress on the pastoral than on the preaching office of the clergy, but, at the same time, she expects them to preach, and, as a rule, does nothing to fit them for this work; so that if a man has an impediment in his speech, or

speaks as if his mouth were filled with dough, the fact may only be discerned after his ordination. In other communions this is better managed. In some the preaching is largely confined to certain orders; in others the ministry is trained almost exclusively for the pulpit. But, as I have said, the English Church lays more stress on the pastoral office, and in this respect there is probably no priesthood in Christendom which excels or even equals it. It is well, perhaps, to remember this: there are so many men whose preaching, indeed, is foolishness, but who are faithfully serving God in their own parishes; leading unselfish lives, helping the poor, comforting the weak, true shepherds of the flock of Christ. They do not shine before the eyes of men, but when "many that are first shall be last and the last first," who shall say where their places may be? And even now very often their lives and the lives of many other silent and patient workers for Christ are sermons which speak to those who are "swift to hear."

But let us look at the matter in a broader fashion. "Let every man be swift to hear; slow to speak." It is a warning, perhaps, which is specially needed for our own times, for we live in a democratic age, and, as every age and system has its own special disadvantages and drawbacks, the weakness of democracy lies in its tendency to be governed by ready tongues. Now, as of old,

Cleon exercises an influence larger than his talents and character warrant. And one of the marked features of a democratic age is a Free Press. A Free Press is a blessing, though sometimes a blessing in disguise. But here, too, there is an obvious danger in the fact that every one is tempted to express his own opinions in print and that a very large number of people yield to the temptation. We notice this tendency to-day in the religious discussions which from time to time appear in our daily papers. It is, to say the least, extremely doubtful how far any good is obtained by open discussion of such questions as, "Do we believe?" or "The Limits of Faith and Reason." A little learning, we know, is a dangerous thing, and people with a little learning are apt to display it. They rush into print; no subject is too great for them. There is no place where they take their shoes from off their feet because it is holy ground, and the general result of the correspondence is often the production of a vast amount of crude and undigested notions picked up in a casual fashion. The rush and hurry of the age in which we live by no means encourage careful and systematic reading and thinking; but they are especially favourable to the process of skimming the surface of many subjects, and in this and other ways tempt men to be swift to speak their own half-formed opinions.

It would not, perhaps, be an exaggeration to say that there is no inconsiderable class of people whose religious opinions are in this way picked up from the daily papers. They always consult these "lively oracles," but we may well be permitted to doubt if this is a special service which the papers are specially fitted to render. As I have said already, the first requisite for attaining to anything like religious conviction is humility and reverence. "Except ye become as little children ye shall by no means enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." Humility, reverence, wonder, admiration—here are the great qualities needed for entering the Kingdom, but are they the qualities which the conditions of our own age tend to nourish? The soul that wonders and admires will seek refuge not so much in speech as in silence; in silence its deepest convictions will be born and matured and tried and tested. It was said of one of the greatest of the mediæval thinkers, St. Thomas Aquinas, that he was distinguished by a habit of silent meditation. Some one called him a "dumb ox." "This dumb ox," said Albert the Great, "will shake the world." Our modern conditions, it is to be feared, tend to produce not so much "dumb oxen" as more loquacious animals of the sort that Balaam rode. The silent chewing of the cud of thought is exchanged for a feverish love of babbling their own opinions, especially their own doubts. Now

all men must have their periods of doubt, for religion is a matter of faith, not demonstration, but the difference between a wise man and a foolish man is that while the former is ready to "consider it again," the latter likes to announce the fact in the papers. Wise men are slow to speak of these things, because they know that eventually men must live by faith, and not by doubt; instead of parading their doubts they will rather hold all the more firmly to the things which cannot be shaken. This is a work which every man has to do for himself in the depth of his own soul, in silence and secrecy. There is a region where none may intrude but God Himself. There is an inward struggling and questioning of which every one who is deep and wise and prudent will be slow to speak.

"Swift to hear; slow to speak." How different, if this counsel of St. James were remembered, would be many of the religious controversies of our day. Let every man be "swift to hear," eager to learn, slow to speak, slow to shout aloud his, perhaps, half-formed or ill-formed notions. Take such a subject as Biblical criticism. We often hear around us strident and passionate voices proclaiming their views on this subject. On the one side there are those who speak as if all the so-called conclusions of extreme criticism had been proved to the hilt, as if every wild guess or assumption

had been verified; on the other are those who pronounce every variation from traditional views of the Bible to be infidel and unchristian. I trust that most of us will be found in neither of those camps. Let us remember that the best English scholarship to-day is represented by men who are sincere and patient, and laborious searchers after truth, who are "swift to hear," swift to receive new light, believing that all light is divine, but slow to speak, slow to rush to hasty and premature opinions. It is quite true that, silently and gradually, many of the traditional views of the Bible have been modified or discarded, but the Bible has not suffered in the process. It does not speak with less power, and the conclusions of extreme and destructive criticism have not been, and are not being, established. Let us strive to be humble and patient learners of all the truths which can be brought to us; not hastily change our opinions, but slowly and reverently assimilating the results of the best learning. And, above all, let us believe in the presence and guidance of that Spirit of Whom our Lord said: "He shall lead you into all truth." These words are true, we believe, of the Church at large. Slowly, all through the centuries, "He has been taking of the things of Christ," and "showing them to men," bringing out the hidden meanings, leading them into larger truth. But they are also true in their own way and degree

of every individual. In the struggles of our own souls, and in the varied experience of life He will lead us, if we will trust Him, into a deeper and more intimate knowledge of God Himself. That is a knowledge which no books or systems can ever give us, and he who would attain unto it must, like Samuel, be ever saying, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

IV

PEACE AND WAR

“Blessed are the peacemakers ; for they shall be called the children of God.”—ST. MATT. v. 9.

THERE is, perhaps, a cause for some surprise in the attitude of the Bible, as a whole, towards war. The Old Testament, as we might expect, is full of fighting. It is taken for granted, and God Himself is the “Lord of Hosts.” It is true that out of the contentions and confusions of their own day there sometimes breaks on the later prophets a sweet vision of peace—a day when men shall “beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks,” when “nation shall not rise against nation, neither shall they make war any more” ; when even the animal creation shall put aside their fierce passions and “the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them”—but war in itself is nowhere condemned, and far away indeed is the vision of the golden

days. And in the New Testament the case is almost more strange. St. Paul seems to revel in military metaphors. He draws his most striking images from the camp and the battlefield. The Christian life is to him a good warfare; the soldier on service suggests the thought of "enduring hardness" for Christ. All this, we feel, would have been very different if St. Paul had been a Quaker. Even the language of our Lord Himself is puzzling. He blesses the peacemakers, and yet says He is come not to bring peace but a sword. Though the song of "Peace on earth and goodwill towards men" hailed His birth, yet in the end we hear of "wars and rumours of wars," and "nation rising against nation." He is the "Prince of Peace," but the last picture of Him is of one whose garment is dipped in blood, and of whom it is said that "in righteousness He doth judge and make war."

All this is surprising: and it has a special interest for us at the present time. For to-morrow there will be witnessed an event which has for us, or ought to have for us, a very deep interest—much deeper than many other things which, perhaps, excite us more—I mean the opening of the Conference at the Hague. There will be gathered together the representatives of the chief nations of the world to consider questions which deeply affect them all. How far can the great armaments of the

world be diminished? How far can the horrors of war be in any way mitigated? To what extent can arbitration be substituted for the dread appeal to arms? The very fact that such a Conference should be held at all is a fact of deep significance; and it cannot help suggesting to us certain questions, such as—Why has not Christianity been more successful in making war to cease? nay, more than that: why has it apparently been so tolerant of what we all agree in these days to be a gigantic evil?

And the answer to these questions seems to be somewhat as follows:—(1) When Christianity came into the world, it found and accepted as a part of the natural order of things the division of the human race into *nations*. Nations existed, and although the Christian religion proclaimed the unity of the human race and preached a universal brotherhood it did not strive to ignore or destroy the actually existing arrangements of the world—those natural arrangements which presumably express the will of God. “It gathered up in itself not only the unions but the chasms of the human race—all that separated as well as all that united; all that divided, and by dividing created variety and individuality in our human world.”¹ But if nations are once recognized, then it is inevitable that war should be recognized also, for in the last resort,

¹ Mozley's “Sermons.”

there is no other method of settling national differences than that of the appeal to arms. But it may be said—"Is not all this contrary to the Sermon on the Mount?" What is the meaning of such words as "Whosoever shall smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other," "Love your enemies, bless those that curse you, do good to them that hate you"? Our answer here must be that the Sermon on the Mount is primarily a message to individuals, not to nations. It bids individuals be loving, meek, humble, willing to forgive. But a nation is not an individual, though by analogy we may sometimes speak of it as such. It can act only through representatives: kings, rulers, statesmen, whoever they may be; and the king or statesman is really in the position of a trustee. The honour and interest of a nation—not his own honour and interest—are given him to defend. We should think ill of a trustee who was so meek and humble that he gave his ward's money to a beggar, on the plea that the gospel said, "Give to him that asketh thee," or who otherwise dissipated or destroyed his ward's property. In the same way we should justly condemn a statesman who, in the name of Christian humility, gave away the rights of his nation.

(2) And in the next place it may also be remembered that in war, men have found opportunity for the exercise of typically Christian virtues.

This is why St. Paul chose the figure of the soldier to suggest the Christian ideal. Why a soldier? because it is his duty to kill? no, but because it is his duty to be killed. In war men have found the sphere in which there has been exercised, often in its very highest forms, the spirit of self-sacrifice. In this way war displays what one writer calls a "solemn morality." We see there, in a particular form, the devotion of the individual to the community, the risk or sacrifice of the single life, for the sake of the whole. I am speaking now of war at its highest. Men may fight only for personal ambition, or they may fight like the condottieri of the middle ages, because they are paid for it. But war at its highest—in the stern grim struggle of nation against nation in a cause in which both believe themselves to be right, or in patriotic resistance to oppression—has often presented a spectacle more lofty, nay, I will say more Christian than many kinds of peaceful activity—a splendid sacrifice akin to that of Him who said, "I lay down my life for the sheep."

It is for such reasons as these that the Christian Society as a whole has refused to endorse the Quaker exaggerations, and to condemn war as necessarily and wholly against the spirit of Christ and the will of God. Christianity lays stress on character, and the struggles of war have often produced character of high nobility. Nay, we may go

further and say that, in the highest and most spiritual interests of the race, the mere abolition of war from the world might be loss rather than gain. It might be another instance of the house empty, swept and garnished, only to admit other and viler demons. For what gain would it be if all the risk and suffering of war were ended only that men might indulge themselves more completely, or devote themselves with more ruthless persistence to robbing their neighbours in a legal and peaceful fashion? Let us remember that the worst wars at the present time are those waged, not by soldiers in gay uniform or shining armour, but by gentlemen robed in tall hats and frock-coats. A dishonest company promoter is less of a Christian than an Indian who proudly exhibits the scalps of his foes; and as Ruskin has said, "it is better for men to ride on war-horses than to back race-horses, and to kill their neighbours than to cheat them."

I have ventured to submit these considerations lest we should be tempted to echo the cry that Christianity has absolutely failed because it has not abolished war; but of course they only touch one side of the matter. There are other sides which one must not forget, nay, on which we must lay not less emphatic stress. In the first place then, we must admit, nay, assert, that war—even though it may be a sphere for the exercise and development of high virtues—is in itself an evil.

The fact is implied in such words as those of the text, "Blessed are the peace- (not war) makers," nay, it is the universal experience and confession. When we think of all the suffering that war entails, the bright and hopeful lives which it cuts short, the ruin and desolation that it causes, the turning of the "fruitful field" into a "wilderness"; when we remember all the waste and destruction that must necessarily accompany it, of all the ills that it brings in its train—"sorrow's faded form and solitude behind"—when we remember how even the preparations for war press upon the great mass of the poor, how the immense armaments of to-day weigh, as it were, upon the very hearts and lives of the people, we shall never regard it as anything in itself but an evil; an evil for the termination of which we ought to pray and work. So again, though I have spoken of war, at its highest, exhibiting the exercise of sublime virtues—endurance and self-sacrifice—yet we must never forget that, in practice, the great majority of wars have not really been those great struggles of nations for faith and freedom; they have far more often been due to the ambition of statesmen or the pride of kings who have contrived to force peasants and labourers to engage in contests of which they had no knowledge and in which they felt no interest, to satisfy a private grudge or to support a tottering throne. Examine the wars fought in Europe

during the last two hundred years, and how many will we find inspired by a really splendid and lofty motive? And when we remember these things we shall, I fear, be compelled to confess that Christianity, as represented by her officers and professors, has again and again failed to condemn that spirit of lust, aggression and tyranny which has brought such untold evils to the human race. I do not, of course, forget that Christianity has done much to mitigate the horrors of war, or that from time to time a Pope or a Bishop has exercised a peace-making influence; or that in a warlike or half-savage society such institutions as the "truce of God" may have called men to a better mind; but far more often we must sadly admit that the Christian Church as a whole has failed to win the benediction of her Master, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

But now we seem to see the dawn of a better day. Of course we must not use the language of exaggeration. There are two classes of people who are to be distrusted, those who speak as though the assembling of a Conference at the Hague meant the beginning of the "Millennium," and then those, who, priding themselves on being "practical persons," pour on it nothing but ridicule and contempt. We may indeed admit that the greater horror of war, the deeper longing for peace

which seems to characterize our times may be due in part, at least, to the fact that great armaments are not only destructive, but also extremely expensive, and that the money spent on them is certainly not "good for trade"; and the practical man will tell us that the ruler who was chiefly responsible for the first Hague Conference was also the first to engage in a great war. It is so—such is the irony of fate—and yet we may well believe that the Hague Conference is really, above all else, the product of Christian sentiment, or, to put it more clearly, the spirit of Christ working as "leaven" in the world's "measures of meal." We cannot say what will be the end of it all. How far may arbitration be, in part at least, a substitute for war? How far will Europe be less like an armed camp? No doubt a good deal of water will run beneath London Bridge, and the trees at the Hague will again and again renew their foliage, before any visible result appears; but that does not matter much. It is something that a new ideal should occupy the hearts of men; it is something that men of divers tongues should "meet together in one place." It happened once before—on the day of Pentecost—and if the hearts of the nations are to be drawn more closely to one another, it will surely be by the operation of the same Spirit, who makes men to be "of one mind in a house." And we—we—if we are Christians at all, will at

least be bound to pray that God, who taught the hearts of His faithful people by sending to them the light of the Holy Spirit, will by the same Spirit give a right judgment to those who are to meet together this week ; and that the blessing resting on them may, in His providence, be the blessing of which it is written, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God"—of the one Great Father of us all.

V

CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

“ Luke, the beloved physician.”—COL. iv. 4.

IT is a commonplace to say that the first Christians were, for the most part, people of little learning and lowly social position. To the Rabbis of Jerusalem the Apostles were “unlearned and ignorant men”; peasants who had left their fields, fishermen who had left their nets. Nor does St. Paul disguise the fact. “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea and things that are not to bring to nought the things which are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.” As one writer says, “The ancient Christians were for the most part slaves and persons of humble rank. The whole history of Christianity is in fact a gradual triumph of the unlearned over the learned, of the lowly over the

great." In a word, the progress of Christianity was from below upwards. And the reason is surely a very simple one—viz. that it was primarily not a Philosophy but a Life. "I am come that ye might have life and have it more abundantly." No religion, indeed, ever made much way by appealing to the intellect. As St. Bernard says, "God does not save the world by logic." Clever people sometimes think that by demolishing this or that intellectual fortress of the faith, they are destroying the faith itself. But they are always wrong. The need of a religion is something much more than an intellectual need. The heart, as Pascal says, has its own reasons, which are all the stronger because they cannot be set out in black and white. So Christianity came to the poor and down-trodden, to the wronged and afflicted, to the sinful and weary, and whispered its hopes and consolations. It gave them what they wanted: strength to endure, forgiveness of sins, a new and a deep sense of the love of God and human brotherhood; a hope of immortal life above the tomb. The world went on its way—the world of Rome, of Corinth, or Philippi—with all its sins and pleasures, but in the midst of them, hidden or half-hidden from the eye, was the little society baptized with the Spirit, breaking the bread of life, and drinking the royal wine of heaven.

Such, at least, was one aspect of the first Christian

societies; but such a picture, by itself, would be incomplete and misleading. From the very beginning there were other elements there. It was not only, after all, the "weak and ignorant and low-born" who were drawn by the Christian message. To-day's text, "Luke, the beloved physician," reminds us that from the first the Christian Church attracted men of culture. The New Testament declares Luke to have been a "physician"; tradition calls him also a painter; his writings proclaim to be, in the words of Professor Ramsay, an "historian of the first class." He may be said to have represented the "culture"—the science—perhaps the art of the day. And sooner or later the question was bound to arise, "What was to be the attitude of Christianity to worldly learning—to art, to science?" Was she always to be in hostility—passive or active—to the world? Was she to stand aside from it—from its culture and learning—from its manifold enterprises and accomplishments—and simply point man to another world?—or was she to go and meet them, as she had met St. Luke, and bring them into her own sphere and touch them with her own spirit? Was she to flee, like John the Baptist, to the desert, or to sit like Christ in the rich man's house, and consecrate it with her presence? And to these questions there has always been two sets of answers. On the one hand, there have always been those

who have received human learning with distrust ; who have seen the snare of the evil one in love of beauty or search for truth ; who have turned away in fear or disgust from the art or science of the world. There were some of the Fathers who forbade their converts to study the classics—almost in the spirit of the Mohammedan Emperor who wished all books destroyed except the Koran. And often in religious revivals we witness the recrudescence of such a spirit. St. Francis forbade his disciples the use of books ; Adrian VI. viewed with disgust the treasures of the Vatican—"idola antiquorum," as he called them. And again and again the spirit of Puritanism has prided itself on its hostility to worldly culture, and its freedom from worldly accomplishments.

And had the Church as a whole chosen what we may call the ascetic way—had she stood apart, in Baptist fashion, from the world, instead of drinking the wine of Cana, or eating bread in Simon's house—her part would in some respects have been a simpler one. She would have avoided many of the falls and failures which have attended her progress ; but she would have done so at the peril or cost of starving one part of man's nature, and of leaving the world to sink into deeper and deeper corruption. She chose the more perilous but the more splendid part. She strove not to forsake the world, but to absorb it. She went forth to meet

and embrace it. "Christianity has always shown its capacity to absorb and assimilate ideas which have grown up outside it. For it is not a crystal in a casket, but a seed, a regenerating force, a principle of life planted in the fruitful ground of human souls."¹ So then we are not surprised to find such a term as "Christian art." No doubt when the Christian Church first came into contact with the world, the existing art of the world had many painful, even degrading, associations. It is hardly surprising that St. Paul, with his Jewish training, could only see "idols" in Athens. But there is honour paid by Christianity to the body as well as to the spirit—her whole sacramental system really determined her relation to Art. Under Christian influence Art became the vehicle for expressing a new order of ideas. Christianity supplied themes and motives which the world had not possessed before: the awful abasement of the Nativity and the Crucifixion, the purity and self-sacrifice of saint and martyr. Who can forget those passages in Ruskin's "Modern Painters" in which he dwells on the expression of Christian feeling in Art, and the types which it alone has produced—the St. Michael of Perugino or the St. Stephen of Fra Bartolommeo, with his "calm forehead crowned by the stony diadem," or the St. Catherine of Raffaele looking up to heaven in the dawn of the eternal day

¹ See Hatch's "Memorials."

—or the Madonnas of Francia and Pinturicchio, “in whom the hues of the morning and the sublimity of eve, the gladness in accomplished promise, and sorrow of the sword-pierced heart, are gathered into one human lamp of ineffable love”—or the angel-choirs of Angelico, with the “flames on their white foreheads waving brighter as they move, and the sparkles streaming from their purple wings like the glitter of many suns upon a sounding sea”? Christian painting, Christian sculpture, Christian architecture—in the form, especially, of the Gothic Cathedral, with its sense of awe and mystery, and with what one writer has called “the thing which is more intoxicating than all the wines of the world,” stained glass windows; Christian music, again, bringing to the soul the “accents of another sphere”—who can doubt that all these have been the handmaids of the Faith? Of course there have been dangers: there have been times of superstition, of excessive veneration of the outward and visible, which have provoked Mohammedan and Puritan protests, but the power of Christianity to touch, transform, elevate, sanctify, purify the Arts can hardly be denied. Let us never strive to put asunder those whom God has joined together. A religion which aims at being exclusively spiritual withers into a hard and narrow Puritanism; an art which is dissociated from religion sinks into a mere minister of luxury; its sphere is the millionaire’s

palace, and it merely serves to decorate the materialism of modern life.

But just as St. Luke the painter speaks to us of the relation of Christianity to art, so does St. Luke "the beloved physician" remind us of its relation to all that is commonly called "science." And here, perhaps, it may seem as though Christianity were in a less fortunate position. For is it not notorious that the relations of the Church and physical science have been for many years somewhat strained? It must be owned that the advances of "science" have frequently been regarded by the representatives of religion with hostility or timidity. The names of Galileo in one age and Darwin in another are associated with humiliating memories. In the supposed interest of Christianity, facts were denied and scientific truths were denounced as "infidelity." And, on the other hand, the representatives of science, accepting only too readily the dilemma of the theologians, and being told to choose between science and religion, have chosen the former, and from the certainty of their own conclusions have proceeded to attack religion as unproved and unprovable by their own methods.¹ "They have regarded faith as a kind of intellectual blindness. They have pictured religion as a Cave of Adullam in which the collective weaknesses of mankind have

¹ Hatch's "Memorials."

taken refuge." Secure in their own triumphs, they have challenged the very existence of a spiritual world.

Must, then, Christianity and science always be in antagonism? are they natural enemies? Let us not for a moment think so. In its earlier days the Church came into contact with a mass of ideas which seemed as alien to it as modern science—I mean Greek Philosophy. The first relations of the two were those of suspicion and misunderstanding. The Gospel was to the Greek foolishness; philosophy was to the Christian infidelity. This misunderstanding lasted for at least two centuries; then gradually the two forces drew nearer to each other; and in the end Christian theology was strengthened and enriched by the very system which it had so dreaded and disliked. Nor are there wanting signs to-day of a better understanding between science and theology—or rather their representatives. On the one hand, theologians have become more modest; they no longer profess to decide scientific questions by texts in Genesis, and the gradual establishment of scientific truth has already affected, and will no doubt in the future still more affect, the progress of theology. And, on the other hand, science is laying aside its pretensions to decide all questions by some rather narrow tests of its own. There has been a marked change of late in the attitude

of men of science to religion.¹ It was recently stated by a man of great knowledge that "all the chief scientific men of the country, with one or two exceptions, were on the Christian side." The statement may have been exaggerated, but there is no question that physical science, in the person of its best representatives, at least in this country, has more and more recognized its limits; like theology, it has become humbler. It has passed, or is passing, from the old materialism to a spiritual interpretation of the universe.

And so, as of old, the Gospel drew the "beloved physician," as well as the poor and the ignorant; and just as it has met the varied needs of the ages since that time, so we may well believe it will be in our day. For, indeed, the needs of human nature remain much the same; and "for all our knowledge and all our civilization, we need something that neither knowledge nor civilization can give." Neither Art nor Science—though each has its own high calling—can possibly satisfy the deeper needs of human nature—its craving for a Divine communion—its thirst for a Divine love—for forgiveness—for spiritual strength—for eternal life—for these we must still go to the Cross of Christ. And though now, as so often before, there be seasons in which the sun of faith seems to be

¹ See, for instance, Sir Oliver Lodge's "The Substance of Faith."

obscured in the heavens, and as in the Psalmist's day there be many that say, "who will show us any good?" we may still answer with the Psalmist's prayer, "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us."

VI

CHRISTIANITY AND RICHES

(A Harvest Festival Sermon)

“Who then is that faithful and wise steward?”—ST. LUKE x. 42.

WE thank God, at a Harvest Festival, for our creation and preservation and all the blessings of this life; but we cannot possibly stop there. For as we look at the world around us, the most blind of us can hardly help recognizing that though God indeed sends His rain on the just and unjust, and makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good, the blessings of this life are enjoyed by some in much larger degree than by others, and most of us can no longer snugly shelter ourselves behind the lines of Isaac Watts:—

“Whene’er I take my walks abroad
How many poor I see;
How thankful should I be to God
For all His gifts to me.”

The rich man in the parable may have attended

a Harvest Festival with great satisfaction, and Lazarus may have had his harvest festival too, to thank God for the crumbs that fell to his share ; but it seems that Dives ought to have asked himself some questions that he forgot to ask, when in his "lifetime" he had his "good things." We, at any rate, know that for us, besides the question, "How many of the blessings of this life do I possess?" lie some other questions, such as, "How did I get them?" and "What am I doing with them?" and perhaps it will not be amiss if we use our Harvest Festival to consider in what way we can answer these questions.

In other words, let us consider what is the teaching of Christ and of the New Testament on the possession and use of the "blessings of this life," of all that we mean by "riches"? It is, of course, possible to answer these questions in a very one-sided fashion. For if we took certain New Testament texts by themselves, and pressed them to their extreme conclusion, it might be argued, as some have argued, that the possession of riches is entirely incompatible with a profession of Christianity. Such words as these at once occur to us:—"Woe unto you rich." "Blessed are the poor." "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven." "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.”
“Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” “Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor . . . and come and follow Me.” “The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.” Such words as these haunt us, and it is well that they should do so. They are meant to haunt us. But when they are pressed to justify or recommend any particular system of distributing property, we are at once met by such words as those of Christ to the younger brother:—“Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” Jesus did not come to create a communistic or socialistic state, for His kingdom is not of this world. He refused to undertake the task of dividing property. He did not counsel Zacchæus to give up “all that he had.” He did not disdain the shelter of the home at Bethany. He sat at meat in the rich man’s house; he numbered rich as well as poor among his friends:—Nicodemus, Joseph, the women who ministered unto Him of their substance. Nor did His apostles and immediate successors ever preach this unlawfulness of possession; on the contrary, they assume its lawfulness. The early Church in Jerusalem might voluntarily attempt a kind of communistic experiment, which ended in disaster, but even then the words of St. Peter to Ananias are quite clear: “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in

thine own power?" while the directions of St. Paul to Timothy assume the existence of a class of rich people in the Church:—"Charge," he says, in words which are well worth repeating and remembering, "charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good; that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." In short, neither Christ nor His followers ever made Christianity dependent upon certain economic conditions. The use of private property is everywhere assumed, nowhere condemned. Of course, there might be, and were, cases in which individuals were counselled to give up all that they had. Such was the case of the rich man. Here our Lord saw the rich soil in which the good seed was strangled by the springing thorns; and he bids the young man by one heroic effort clear the ground and free the soul. Many individuals have been called since to make a similar sacrifice; but to require such a sacrifice from *all* would be to condemn the world to be an unfruitful desert.

What, then, is the message of Christ to the rich? Let us sum it up as briefly as possible under two heads.

(1) He bids them consider the effect of their possessions upon their own souls—their own characters. Are they losing their souls, losing their true lives, spoiling their characters, by reason of what they possess?—are they even tempted to think that “life consists in the abundance of things which a man possesseth”? This is the first, the great question; true life, say Jesus, is the life within, it is the life of the spirit; how is that affected by the outward circumstances and conditions of life? Now, of course it is quite true that all external conditions affect, or may affect, our inward lives and characters. Poverty has dangers of its own; poverty often tempts men to be lying and cringing; to make paltry gains in a dishonest fashion; to affect religious habits for ulterior motives. The dangers of poverty are expressed in a homely proverb which tells us that “an empty sack cannot stand upright.” But poverty has its compensations, and our Lord does not dwell so much on the dangers of poverty as its blessings, for the simple reason that most people do not desire to be poor. He dwells on the danger of riches, because men do desire to be rich; and for that reason the danger of riches is greater than that of poverty. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man (not a poor man) to enter into the kingdom of heaven. He has illustrated that danger

by one immortal instance—the story of Dives and Lazarus. There we see the rich man lulled, stupefied into a callous self-indulgence and hard indifference and careless pride. We have not to look far to see the effect of riches on many of those around us. We see men and women whose whole life is a restless pursuit of excitement. We see them, very often, coarsened by the pleasures of the table. We see them the slaves of their own comfort rather than the masters. We see them, sometimes, inconsiderate to their servants; we see them unready for self-sacrifice, refusing, for instance, as many of those in this part of London refuse, to take their share in works of public utility. We see them, perhaps, talking scornfully or impatiently of the “lower classes.” We *need* not see any of these things; there are many who though rich in pocket are poor in spirit, and are ever “serving” their brethren in one way or another. But these are some of the dangers of riches; and those of us who possess them are bound to ask, “What are their effects on my character? what sort of a man or woman are they helping to make me?”

(2) And, in the next place, the teaching of Christ and Christianity is, that riches—while they may be held and enjoyed (for Jesus did not preach a barren asceticism)—are to be regarded as a *trust*—a trust to be accounted for. “Who, then,” He asks, “who, then, is a faithful and wise

steward?" An honest business man who is a trustee feels bound to treat the money committed to him with a special care; and even if he is not an honest man, he always has the fear of the law before him. Our Lord would have us all regard wealth as a trust to be administered in the light of the words, "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." He tells us the story of a man in whom no such feeling of trusteeship existed, and who had no thought of a reckoning. "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods; and I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

And if, leaving generalities, we inquire in what special ways He would have us display the sense of responsibility for our possessions—the getting or spending of them—there are some answers which will at once occur to us, though I can only touch them very slightly.

(1) There is the setting aside of a certain proportion of our possessions for almsgiving. That is

an obvious duty—which few dispute in theory—though many who “profess and call themselves Christians” often fail in practice. And if we ask, Why do they so often fail? the answer must be, Because they have not realized that systematic almsgiving is a part of the Christian life and duty. They take no trouble about it. They vaguely mean to be generous some day ; and now and then they give in an impulsive and irregular way—in reply, perhaps, to some hysterical appeal. But they take no trouble. I often think it is not so much the money we spend on our enjoyments, as the money which we waste in utter carelessness, for which we will have to give the stricter account ; money wasted in things which add nothing to the comfort or the beauty of life. It is the careless person who never has anything to spare but the smallest coin for a Church collection ; the careless, not the most magnificent. But we should not be so careless if we realized more completely that our possessions were a trust. We should gather up the fragments that nothing might be lost. A cathedral or a hospital could be built every year in London with money merely thrown away on things which have brought no pleasure or profit to any one.

(2) But, secondly, let us not suppose that money may be spent only on what would be called “useful.” There is another employment of wealth

consecrated by our Lord's acceptance, at the hands of Mary, of the "box of ointment exceeding precious," by its ministering to happiness and beauty. Bread, indeed, is good, but "man shall not live by bread alone." Expenditure of wealth on art, on music, on education, on the opening of the resources of Nature to the weary life of cities, on the "emancipation of mankind from commercial standards, on the provision of humanizing and symbolic ways of pleasure, is not only justified through its elevating and educative effect, but it rests also on the authority of the teaching of Jesus Christ."

(3) And, once more, we can hardly read the words of Christ without discovering that, quite as important as either of these ways, He counts the gaining and use of money in a faithful and honourable manner in whatever work a man may be engaged. He lays great stress, in His parables taken from common life, on the *faithful* man — "Well done, good and faithful servant." He condemns the steward who had been unfaithful to his trust; the porter who slept at his post; the husbandman who fancied that there would be no reckoning. The question, "How am I getting money?" is clearly not less important than "How am I spending it?" Those who in the common life of the world will act on the highest principles—whose hands have never been soiled by any dishonour—

are doing far more for the world than the most generous almsgiver; nor can any one sanctify dubious transactions in the city by a lavish philanthropy, nor atone for "devouring widows' houses" by "making long prayers"; though, perhaps, we have known the attempt made, and accepted not only by the world but by the Church.

These, then, it seems to me, are some of the questions which we ought to be putting to ourselves; some of the considerations which ought to be in our minds on a morning like this, when we thank God for "all the blessings of this life"; and if any one asks, "Who is the Christian rich man?" I will answer that question in words which seem to me very much to the point—which are certainly far better than any of my own:—

"Who,¹ then, is the Christian rich man? It is he who recognizes that in the management of his wealth he is in the presence of a constant and subtle temptation; that, as Jesus said, there is in the nature of increasing wealth a peculiar quality of 'deceitfulness,' so that the money which is at first one's servant is at any moment likely to become one's master. The Christian rich man knows well that it is hard for him to enter the kingdom of God. He observes the characters of many men shrivel in the flame of prosperity. He sees that conditions of luxury, ease, and lack of the friction

¹ See Peabody's "Jesus Christ and the Social Question."

of life contribute to a slackening of moral fibre. He holds before himself, therefore, the solemn alternatives of Jesus: the mastery of wealth, or the abandonment of it. Thus the wealth of the Christian rich man becomes to him a trust, for the use of which he is to be scrupulously judged. He administers his affairs with watchfulness over himself and with hands clean of malice, oppression, or deceit. He does not hope to atone for evil ways of making money by ostentatious benevolence in spending it. He is to be judged according to his ways of accumulating wealth as rigidly as for his ways of distributing wealth. He is not hard in business and soft in charity, but of one fibre throughout. His business is a part of his religion, and his philanthropy is a part of his business. He leads his life, he is not led by it. His five talents produce other five. And who is the Christian rich woman? It is she who finds it not impossible to be rich in purse and poor in spirit. She accepts her opportunity watchfully. She knows herself a servant of whom much is required. In the midst of a world of foolishness and vanity she maintains simplicity and good sense. She is equally at home among the rich and the poor. No severer test of the Christian life than this can be proposed for any woman, and no fairer type of character is to be met than that which issues from such a test, having passed through the needle's eye.

If Jesus Christ should come again, He would know what it has cost a man to put under his foot the lust of riches, or a woman to keep her heart clean from the temptations of self-indulgence. Into the homes of such men and women, however splendid their homes may be, Jesus would enter gladly, as He entered the home of Zacchæus or that of Martha and Mary. On such a man, on such a woman, He would look with a peculiar love, as He looked on the young man with great possessions. The conflict with Mammon has prepared for such a soul the way to eternal habitations. The servant stands ready for the Master's reckoning, and the Master comes and says: 'Well done, . . . enter into the joy of thy Lord.'"

VII

SALT WITHOUT SAVOUR

“Ye are the salt of the earth ; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted ? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”—ST. MATT. v. 13.

It may not be amiss if, at the beginning of Lent, we take these words as the subject of a few minutes' consideration. They were spoken, as we know, to our Lord's disciples, and each of the three leading words of this short sentence, “Ye are the salt of the earth,” appears to have a significance of its own. First, *Ye*, “you living men and women.” This was one meaning of the Incarnation, that the unseen God should be revealed by and through the “man Christ Jesus.” Christ Himself must be chiefly known—not through His words or even His personal example—but through the men and women who are the living embodiments of His spirit. He calls them by high names, “Ye are the light.” I am the light ; ye are the light. He is to shine through them.

There was a famous North Devon clergyman who, conscious, perhaps, that his own life was not a model of pastoral virtue, used to say to his parishioners, "You must follow the light, not the lantern;" but to those simple folk the light was in the lantern, and perhaps they hardly knew how to separate the two. So, again, "Ye are the salt;" ye—not my words, not my doctrine, not a code of ethics or theological treatises, but ye—living persons—"are the salt of the earth," and to this He adds a melancholy warning—a foreboding—"But if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" *Corruptio optimi pessima*. Eastern travellers tell us—Thomson, for instance, in the "Land and the Book," says—that a case came under his own observation, when a merchant of Sidon had stored up a quantity of salt in a cottage with an earthen floor, in consequence of which it was spoiled, and he saw "large quantities literally thrown out into the street to be trodden by man and beast." He adds, "It is a well-known fact that the salt of this country, when in contact with the ground, or exposed to rain and sun, does become insipid and useless. Then the manner in which it is gathered is such that earth and other impurities are necessarily mixed up with it. Not a little of it is so impure that it cannot be used at all, and such salt soon turns to dust—not to fruitful soil, however. It is not only good for

nothing, but it absolutely destroys all fertility wherever it is thrown, and that is why it is cast out into the street." All which things, if we consider them, may have a meaning and significance for us all. Was it some memory of our Lord's warning, do you think, about the salt which has lost its savour and is only fit to be cast into the street, that found an echo in those stern words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame"?

"Ye are the salt of the earth." Ye are the *salt*. Again notice the significance of the metaphor in one at least of its aspects. When our Lord calls His disciples—"those who profess and call themselves Christians"—the salt of the earth, He is implicitly warning us against a vulgar error—the error of estimating, or trying to estimate, the real influence of any movement by the simple process of counting heads. It is an exceedingly popular one, as we all know. Enterprising newspapers send forth emissaries to count and report the number of persons attending church on such a

day, and then contrast the number of church-goers with the number of absentees. It is a process which may give us some food for reflexion. Would God that all His people had a desire and longing to go into the House of the Lord, and to enter into the fellowship of the Church! But to suppose that any cause is weak or faint because the number of its open and professed adherents is small compared with the numbers of the hostile or indifferent is to repeat the error which was made by Elijah long ago, and which drew down on him the divine rebuke, "Yet have I left me seven thousand in Israel, every knee that hath not bowed to Baal, and all the mouths which have not kissed him." There they were, the *salt* of Israel. The fact is that, from some points of view, it is not so much the quantity of Christians that matters, as the quality, and the failure in the latter respect is often far more grievous than in the former. The number of persons habitually attending divine worship may be small compared with those who do not, and that is, in my humble opinion, a matter for deep concern and regret. But the former are quite sufficient to be the "salt of the earth," if they mean but a little of what they say, or realize even a little such words as "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"; "Ye shall be perfect." There was once a city which might have been

saved by "ten righteous" if only they could have been found.

And once more, "Ye are the *salt* of the *earth*"; of the earth—not of Heaven. True it is, to earth that we belong—to earth—and even though our spirits soar beyond the stars, on earth our feet are set. Let us never be tempted by any superfine religion to try and forget or ignore this fact. Sons of God, we are also children of earth—that dear mother who even now is bearing the snowdrops and the crocuses—"our little sisters," as St. Francis would have called them, "the snowdrops and the crocuses." We belong to the earth; we belong to the world, the earth—the world of men and women living and acting, sinning and striving all around us. The salt of the *earth*—not of religious societies, not of saved sects, not of converted cliques, affecting to despise or condemn the "world," but of the common earth, the common world, the world of business and of pleasure, commerce, politics, Parliament, the City, the Stock Exchange -of the great cities with their teeming thousands of obscure workers—*here* is where the salt has to do its work. The "good Church-people" are not merely the communicants, but those who carry with them into business and politics, into society in general, whether in the west or the east, the salt of a higher honour, justice, purity, usefulness. Woe to that Church

which is more concerned with questions of ritual than for all that affects the common lives of men. God save us here in England from that danger which is not such a very fanciful one. It was the doom of the Pharisee of old: "Woe unto you Pharisees; for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not leave the other undone."

"Ye are the salt of the earth." Salt has, we might say, two special functions of its own. In the first place it is a preserving and purifying power. It saves from corruption. It is an influence which, as we have said, is more felt than seen. In all the sensational pictures of modern society which are painted for us by rhetorical artists, there is no doubt much to alarm and disquiet one. We are always hearing of the vileness, the rottenness of it all—the mad pursuit of pleasure, the dubious or discreditable methods of making money, the scandals of the card-tables, the shame of the divorce court, the contemptuous indifference to religion; tales of intrigue and dishonour are more than hinted at in "society papers," and are more than whispered in all ranks of society. That is one side of the matter—too true, much of it, too true—but not all the truth. If this were all, society would be dissolved; and the putrid carcase would be cast out, as it was cast out in the French

Revolution, and trodden under foot. But it is not all. There is a "salt of society" which does not furnish material for sensational paragraphs; which is probably invisible to the eye of the social scavenger. There are those who uphold the standards of purity and honour; those of whom it may be said that in the midst of the world—not far from it—they are keeping themselves unspotted and incorrupt. The "saints which are in Cæsar's household"—Dorothy Osborn in the Court of Charles II.—they are not food for "interviewers," but they are with us—and they are the "salt" of the society to which they belong.

Or, once more, salt suggests the notion of something strong and pungent—that which adds taste and flavour to all that it touches. I am afraid that this is not the idea which we always connect with good people. Goodness is often regarded as something excellent but insipid; "the lilies and the languors of virtue." Good people are frequently conceived of, not as the most strenuous souls, but rather as negative and colourless, or, at the best, sweet and consoling, as though our Lord had said, not "ye are the salt," but "ye are the sugar of the earth." But such is not the conception of St. Paul. "Let your speech," he says, "be seasoned with salt." There are two forms of speech which are the opposite to that which he recommends—the "corrupt" speech and the

"foolish" conversation. No doubt his warning was partly against the first, for in the Apostle's day as in ours there were those who mistook impurity for wit, but it was mainly against the latter. It is a pity when we hear from the people who are really good at heart, a stream of weak and wasly gossip, or semi-religious tittle-tattle. It was one of the services that a late eminent prelate did to the society of his day, that he brought to it a speech "seasoned with salt," that he showed that good men could be witty too. Do not let us give in to the notion that there is any natural connexion between goodness and dulness, or goodness and weakness. When our Lord said to his disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth," He did not mean that they were to be the wits of the world; but surely he meant that they were to bring to it the savour—shall we say—of consecrated intelligence as well as of moral purity.

It would, of course, be quite easy to show how often the Church has failed in what Christ meant it to be: how often religion as seen in its representatives has become so corrupt and feeble that men have been tempted to "cast it out and tread it under foot." There is no time to illustrate that fact, which few of us will doubt, but we may well conclude with a practical question, to which, perhaps, in the course of Lent we may be able to find an answer. You and I, by our presence in Church

this morning, do at least "profess and call ourselves Christians," but how far are we the salt of the earth? How far are we a strong and salutary element in society? Are our methods of doing business, our standards of purity and charity, are they easily distinguished from those who never say the Creeds, or kneel at the Altar? is the tone of our lives and conduct at all higher? These are really important questions. Salt is good; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? The earth needs the Christian religion as much as ever it did; but an insipid and savourless Christianity will not long be tolerated. It is a fearful thing to realize that in *us* Christ Himself reigns or fails: that by *us* He is judged, that through *us* His name is blessed or blasphemed. And certainly, as I have said, it will not be waste of time if in the next few weeks we ask how far we are, or set ourselves to become, through the grace of God, something of what our Lord meant us to be when He said, "Ye are the salt of the earth"; when He warned us that the saddest thing in the world is a bad Christian. "If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" For there is something more tragical than Jesus crucified by Caiaphas and Pilate—it is the Christ who is wounded "in the house of His friends."

VIII

SUNDAY

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty ; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”—GAL. v. 13.

It has been suggested that to-day we should draw the attention of our congregations to the question of Sunday observance. At first sight such a plan appears to have very little to recommend it. It seems rather absurd to address those who by their presence at church are so far at least observing Sunday. Would it not be better, it may be said, to go out and preach this message to those who are not in church at all? But I do not think this objection is quite so forcible as it sounds, because as a matter of fact both among churchgoers and non-churchgoers, there is a very considerable amount of mental confusion on this question. We are always hearing disputes as to how Sunday should be observed, but there is one preliminary question which apparently is considered of no importance, viz. “What is Sunday?” and until

we have answered this preliminary question it does not seem to me that we can get on very far. The popular notion, I suppose, may be said to be that Sunday has some connexion, some vague or shadowy connexion, with the Jewish Sabbath, and is governed by the fourth commandment. Even among educated people it is quite common to find the impression that Sunday is really only the old Sabbath transferred to another day of the week.

Now so long as this unhistorical delusion holds the field, it is impossible for us to get very much further. Let me for a few minutes, at the risk perhaps of dulness, try to examine this question this morning. I do so with some misgivings, partly because I know from experience how easily a preacher's words can be misinterpreted or misrepresented, and partly because "the Sunday question" is one on which very many people feel, and feel rightly, in a very strong manner. Any preacher, for instance, who refuses to take the Sabbatarian ground for the observance of Sunday, is frequently regarded as making an attack upon the Christian faith; but we must risk something, and we must try to see things as they really are.

What, then (this is the first question), was the Sabbath? The answer, I think, is quite a clear one. The Sabbath was a Jewish holy day. And how did they get their Sabbath? It seems at least highly probable that the Jewish Sabbath came from

Babylon, or at least that the Jewish and Babylonian Sabbaths were both derived from some common origin. In the Babylonian records there is frequent mention of the Sabbath, which is called "a day of rest for the heart," not meaning, as one would suppose, a day of rest for the heart of man, but rather a day of rest from the wrath of the gods, a special day for their pacification.¹ In the Babylonian tablets we find certain days of the month turning on the number 7, the 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th, and also the 19th (probably as being 7 times 7 from the previous month) being observed in a very special fashion. They are called in the tablets by a strange name, "favourable days, evil days," while the other days of the month are known merely as "favourable days." They are days which are marked by certain definite restrictions. They are observed in a religious or superstitious fashion. On these days the king is forbidden to go in his chariot; he is forbidden to hold audiences, to eat cooked food, and several other actions of this kind; the reason being that for some reason or other these acts upon special days were supposed to excite the anger of the gods. They were in fact "unlucky" days, such as are, of course, frequently found in all religions of the earth.

Now it seems highly probable that the Jewish

¹ See Driver, Art. "Sabbath"; Hastings' "Dictionary of Bible."

Sabbath, which was marked solely by restrictions, either came from this source, or that the Jewish and Babylonian Sabbaths had a common origin. I need hardly remind you that the religious genius of Israel frequently adopted the customs of neighbouring tribes or nations, and in adopting them purified them from their grosser elements. It is quite possible that Moses may have found this institution and reconsecrated it to the service of God. It seems quite certain that the fourth commandment was originally given in a very short form, such as : "The Sabbath day, keep it holy." In later days men found various reasons for keeping the Sabbath. In Exodus, for instance, in the version we know best, it is said to be kept in memory of God's rest after the creation, and in Deuteronomy in remembrance of His bringing the people out of Egypt. It is quite obvious from these various explanations that the origin of the Sabbath was really unknown, and was lost in some dim antiquity. If this be so, then surely we are justified in saying that the Sabbath was just a part of the Jewish law, like circumcision, or the differences between clean and unclean meats. It was used, in the providence of God, for the education of the people, it was the "pedagogue," the slave who led children to their true and final master, who in this case was Christ Himself, and when it had done its work it was no more needed.

When our Lord said upon the cross, "It is finished," the old law was fulfilled. Its day was over, and the Sabbath was just part of those ordinances of which St. Paul says that the Lord took them in triumph and nailed them to His cross.

What, then, was the attitude (for this is an important question) of the first Christians towards the Sabbath? The answer here is that the attitude of the first Christians towards the Sabbath was just the same as their attitude to all the rest of the Jewish law. The first Christians, of course, were mostly Jews, and it is no wonder that for some time there was a certain amount of confusion as to how far the old law was still binding upon Christians. It was, in fact, the most important controversy in the early Church. There were many Christian Jews, Christian Pharisees, who regarded Christianity mainly as a sort of addition to Judaism, but when the Christian faith spread among the Gentiles this became no longer possible. It was impossible to suppose that all the nations of the earth in accepting Christianity were also going to accept the old Jewish law, and here we come across the greatest of all the controversies and all the problems which the early Church had to face. It was a problem which, by the providence of God, was solved by St. Paul. Fortunately for us his answer was exceedingly clear. There is no possible

mistaking it. Writing to the Colossians you will remember how he says, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days : which are a shadow of things to come ; but the body is of Christ." He does not separate them : he does not say that distinctions of meats and new moons need no longer be observed, but the Sabbath is still binding. He sets them on exactly the same level. Even when in the early Church a compromise was attempted with the Gentiles and certain observances were enjoined upon the Gentile Christians, the Sabbath is not mentioned in that decree. So again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the writer delights in drawing out all the analogies that he can find between the old and the new, where he finds parallels in the old institution of sacrifices and sacred places, there is no mention at all of the Sabbath appearing even in a new form. The Sabbath becomes merely a type of the rest into which God's people should enter, partly now, more completely hereafter : "There remaineth therefore a (Sabbath) rest for the people of God."

The conclusion of all these things is quite inevitable. The Sabbath and the distinction between clean and unclean meats, and the rest, are all set upon exactly the same level. All are binding or none.

What, then, it may be asked, is the Christian Sunday? Here also we find a perfectly clear answer. The Christian Sunday was a day of worship evolved by the practical needs and the life of the early Church. At first, it is quite clear, all days were observed in exactly the same fashion in Jerusalem; there were no holydays; every day, "day by day," the disciples broke bread, celebrated the Eucharist, from house to house, but here again as the Christian faith spread among the Gentiles and this daily perpetual worship became more and more difficult, it was necessary, if the disciples were to meet together at all for common worship, that they should meet upon stated days. Remember that at this time the institution of the "week" was fully established in the Roman Empire. What, then, more natural than that the disciples, seeking for a day on which they could meet together, should select the first day of the week, which was already consecrated to them by the memory of the Lord's resurrection? So we find it was "upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread." Some time between the years 60 and 90 A.D., roughly speaking, this first day of the week acquired a new name. It began to be known as the "Lord's Day," partly from its association with the Lord's resurrection, and partly from its close connexion with the Lord's Supper, and that, in

fact, is the only Christian title of this day, which we may regret to have so entirely lost.

But notice that the Christians meeting together for worship never for one moment supposed that they were keeping the Sabbath. They would have indignantly repudiated the assertion. That would have been going back to what St. Paul calls "the beggarly elements" of the law. The "Sabbath" where it is mentioned in the New Testament always means one thing, the day we call Saturday, the old Sabbath of the Jews. Sunday, the Lord's Day, was an entirely different institution. It is not probable that at first it was kept, except for worship, any differently from other days. During the first three centuries of the Church's life there is not the slightest confusion in any Christian writer between the two days, though they are often sharply contrasted. It was only later, in mediæval times, when the thoughts of men harked back in many ways to legal bondage and the great freedom of Christianity was lost; it was only then that the confusion began to arise; and the confusions of mediævalism were perpetuated, strangely enough, by Puritans. For the Puritans, as you remember, entirely repudiated the authority of the Church. They, therefore, logically should have repudiated the Lord's Day as being a Church holy day, but feeling the practical necessity of some special day of worship, they went to their Bible (which alone

they acknowledged) to try and find directions for the observance of Sunday. They found none, but they found a great deal about the Sabbath and rules attaching to it. They, therefore, boldly identified the Sabbath with the Lord's Day, and then proceeded to apply, so far as possible, the rules which bound the Sabbath to the Lord's Day observance.

What, then, are the conclusions to which we are driven by these facts? for I venture to think that they are facts. There are one or two which are perfectly obvious. (1) First of all there is this: that Sunday has no historical connexion whatever with the Jewish Sabbath. It is a holy day of the Church like Christmas Day, or Ascension Day, only more august than any other day because it is more ancient. We cannot say that it was instituted by our Lord Himself even. Many have thought it was among the things "pertaining to the Kingdom of God," of which He spake after the resurrection to His disciples. This may or may not be. We can prove nothing at all from silence, or at least people can only prove what they wish to believe. We must stick to facts. What is certain is this—if it was not instituted by the Lord Himself, it was the most direct product of the Church, the Church which is His body, His representative, the "fulness of Him that filleth all in all." (2) It follows that if Sunday is not the Sabbath, it is not in any way

governed by the fourth commandment. At first, this may appear rather a startling conclusion, or at least some will say, "Why is the fourth commandment read in the Communion service; is it not somewhat confusing?" I think we must admit that it might be somewhat confusing, but fortunately for us the Church in the Catechism has herself explained the exact manner in which she intends the fourth commandment to be understood. It is explained simply as to "serve Him truly all the days of my life." The Church only sees in the fourth commandment the spiritual principle that our time belongs in a true sense to God, all our time. What particular portion of it should be devoted to worship is a question not touched upon there at all. (3) We observe that the Christian Sunday is a day of worship. That is its mark, that alone. Neither work nor recreation is in itself forbidden. (4) But it is worth noticing that Sunday has become in the course of time, through the influence of the Church, a great social institution, and as such has been largely marked by abstinence from toil, not because honest toil is in itself wrong, but because human nature requires some respite from perpetual work. In this way it has acquired an almost inestimable social value. It has been more than anything else the great protection of the labouring poor.

If we remember all the facts that I have tried in

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this hasty way to bring before you, I think we have done something to clear the ground. When the question is asked, "How ought Sunday to be observed?" there are two principles which seem from a Christian point of view to be quite obvious. In the first place, as I have said, it is the great day of worship, and the first duty of a Christian is to use it as a day of worship. So strong is popular confusion that there are really quite a large number of people who suppose that they have spent an excellent Sunday—if they have given no portion of it to worship at all—so long as they do nothing active, and eat and sleep a little more than usual. The great note of Sunday is this note of worship. In other ways Sunday customs have changed through the ages almost indefinitely. They have changed from one age to another, but this has been its one abiding mark, it has always been the great day of Christian worship. From this it seems to follow that it must be left to the individual Christian conscience as to how those portions of the day which are not consumed in worship shall be spent. There are no Sabbath rules which bind us in any way whatever. As St. Paul says, "We have been called unto liberty." If it is necessary to work we can do so without an ill conscience. If we require recreation we can take it as Christians. It is quite impossible, for instance, from a Christian point of view, to say that a healthy game is in

itself wrong. But, remember, we cannot stop here; the apostle of liberty does not stop here. He goes on—"Take care not to use your liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." There is something which governs the observance of Sunday: it is not the fourth commandment, but something much greater—the great Christian law of love. Let us take care in claiming liberty for ourselves we do not lay burdens upon others. Is not this a real danger? When Sunday becomes the hardest day of the week for riverside people or for servants in the great houses, or when the "caddy" is prevented from receiving Christian instruction that he may serve the needs, or supposed needs, of some one else, surely there is something wrong. We are breaking, not the Sabbath, but that high and eternal law of love by which we are bidden to serve one another. I ask you, men, especially to consider this subject very carefully, for it is one of high importance. Claim your liberty, yes, but do not press it, do not use it to the very utmost, and, above all, take care that you do not make your liberty, as St. Paul says, "an occasion to the flesh," that is to say, an opportunity of merely selfish amusement.

Let me just sum up hastily what I have been trying to say. Although I am bound to reject the grounds for Sunday observance by many assumed or put forward, and the arguments by which it is

supported, I yield to no one in my belief in the intense value of this holiday of the Church. It has its value for the *individual*. But for the Sunday worship, which generally means the *only* worship, how easy would it be to lapse into practical forgetfulness of God! Depend upon it, my brethren, your Sunday worship is doing a great deal more for you even than you think. How pressing is the need for the refreshing of the spirit among the cares and pleasures of the world which worship alone can give us! It is the day of Christ's resurrection, the day of His new life. It may be a day of new life for us as well. "Wherefore, He saith, Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

And besides the individual there is also its great value for *society*. This is true in many ways, not the least I think as being a day of common worship, for it is common worship after all which reminds us more than anything else that "no man liveth to himself or dieth to himself," that we are all children of one Father, and members one of another. "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body;" and how shall we quicken that sense of unity and fellowship better than by praying together to the one Father, or joining together in that high service in which we realize that "we being many are one bread, one body, for we are all partakers of the one Bread"?

IX

THE PSALM OF THE PENITENT

“Against Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight.”—PSA. li. 4.

THIS is the Psalm of the Penitent—one of the seven “penitential” psalms, as they are called, and of all of them, perhaps, the fullest and most impressive. There is something very moving in the thought of all the thousands who, in days gone by, have found in it the expression of their own thoughts and feelings—as perhaps a few of you have done this morning. The use of the Psalms in public worship is a question which is sometimes debated, and upon which many opinions may be held. It is pointed out that some of them are unfitted for Christian use—as when, for instance, the singer, frenzied by the thought of the injuries inflicted by Edom upon his country, cries, “Blessed shall he be that taketh thy children and throweth them against the stones.” It is said also, and not without reason, that they often are, partly perhaps

through defects of translation, practically unintelligible to the great mass of church-goers. And, as a consequence of those objections, it has sometimes been urged that, instead of the Psalms being used as they are in their entirety, it would be no small gain if a selection were made of those specially suitable for the use of congregations. The idea sounds an admirable one. The only difficulty arises when we ask the question—who is to do the selection? Here, it must be confessed, the answer is not quite clear. Few of us, probably, would care to commit the task of choosing sacred poetry either to the Houses of Parliament or to a Committee of Convocation, and on the whole, perhaps, it is better to leave things as they are. It is true that all the Psalms are not suited to public Christian worship; but it is equally true that a large part of them are so; that what fails to appeal to one mind, may and often does appeal very strongly to another; and that Christian experience has testified to the fact that the Psalter, as a whole, is the best and noblest expression of religious emotion, in all its various moods, that the Church has ever seen or, perhaps, will ever see. It is true, as one writer has said, that “the Psalms are a mirror in which each man sees the motions of his own soul. They express in exquisite words the kinship which every thoughtful human heart craves to find with a responsive,

unchanging, loving God, who will be to him a Protector, Guardian, and Friend. They utter the ordinary experiences, the familiar thoughts of men ; but they give to them a width of range, an interest, a depth, an elevation which transcends the capacity of the most gifted. They translate into speech the passion of the loftiest genius ; they also utter with the beauty born of truth and simplicity, and with exact agreements between the feeling and the expression, the inarticulate and humble longings of the unlettered peasant. So it is that in every country the language of the Psalms has become part of the daily life of nations, passing into their proverbs, mingling with their conversation, and used at every critical stage of existence.”¹

It is unnecessary to enter this morning at any length into the large question of the date and authorship of the Book of Psalms. No doubt many of them—most of them—were of late date—after the exile—but some, at least, must have been of earlier times, and there is a long tradition which connects the Psalm before us with a crisis in the life of David himself. That tradition cannot be regarded as finally established, but we may, I think, be content to-day to assume its truth. The King of Israel had been guilty of a great sin. Elated by success and prosperity he had for awhile, it would seem, been hardened and blinded. It

¹ “The Psalms in Human Life” (R. E. Protheroe).

needed a prophet to arouse the dull and sleeping conscience—"Then said Nathan unto David, Thou art the man!" There is nothing surprising about David's sin: there is something very wonderful in his penitence. To his sin there may be found only too numerous parallels in the lives of men drunk with despotic power; to his repentance there is, perhaps, no parallel, and, as we have said, the Psalm before us, if indeed it be his utterance, has never been excelled in depth and intensity of feeling even by those saints who have learnt the secret of repentance at the Cross of Christ Himself.

Let us then, briefly, consider it under this aspect.

(1) There is the simple confession, "I have sinned!" It is comparatively seldom that a man makes this confession without any qualification or reserve. Indeed, it is not going very much too far to say that there is a very widely-spread tendency in our own day not to confess sin at all. Sometimes it is openly proclaimed that sin is a theological fiction, of which the new morality will take no account; while in a great deal of popular thought the common babble about "heredity" and "environment" undoubtedly tends to weaken the sense of personal guilt or individual responsibility. The Psalmist, indeed, was not ignorant, it would seem, of the hereditary taint in his nature when he says, "In sin hath my mother conceived me," but he does not appear on that account to feel less

acutely his own personal guiltiness. Possibly also, David might have pleaded some doctrine of "environment" as excusing the lapse which he could not deny, but he does not seem to have done so. With us the case, as we know, is different. "I have had everything against me," says one, "from my birth, and even before it. I was brought up in the worst possible surroundings. I was accustomed from my youth to crime and violence; what wonder if I turn out as I am? what else could it be?" "I was born," says another, "in a class of society from which one really does not look for heroic virtue. I was reared in luxury and idleness. No one ever set before me any ideal but that of enjoying myself, and getting the means of doing so. The social set to which, by birth and position, I belong, is not one which pretends to have any exalted moral standards. The breath of social scandals seemed to be always blowing upon me. The men and women by whom I was surrounded had no religion, and very little virtue. My mother never taught me anything but the duty of making a successful marriage. So I married—and if it was not very successful, am I to blame?" "I was brought up," says a third, "in a Puritanical household. My parents, I assure you, overdid the religious part altogether. They were so absurdly strict in such things as church-going and Sunday

observance. They made such a fuss about trifling faults. Can you be surprised that there was a reaction? You say I have sinned; but really I am the victim of circumstances."

Who has not heard such voices as these? And by the side of them there is something very refreshing in the manly confession of the Psalmist, "I have sinned!—I, even I." When we ask why David used such language, the answer seems to be a very clear one. We considered last week¹ one great contribution of the Jewish people to the progress of humanity, their insistence on the claims of the moral law. The ten commandments were stamped, as it were, on the national conscience. But this insistence on the claims of the moral law was itself the outcome of a yet greater conviction, viz. that the moral law was merely the expression of the mind of God, whose supreme rights were infringed by sin. This was one of the Psalmist's conceptions; the other was that he himself was a free agent, responsible for his acts and thoughts. He was not troubled by those philosophical and metaphysical difficulties about the freedom of the will of which we hear so much. His liberty was a matter of personal consciousness. His sin was a rebellion against the Holy Perfect Being, before whom he set himself, and Who had set his misdeeds before Him and his secret sins in the light of

¹ This sermon is not included in the present volume.

His countenance. From that Being he was conscious of separation and alienation, and so he says "I have sinned."

And so we shall all say when, putting aside the cavils which darken and confuse our minds, we, like the Psalmist, set ourselves in the presence of God. It is a great day for a man when, for a moment, seeing himself in the light of God, seeing his own imperfections, his own sinfulness, whatever it may be, he can cast aside the vain excuses by which he has tried, like Adam, to hide himself among the trees of the garden, and, in deep self-abasement, can make the open confession, "I will arise and go unto my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned before Heaven and against Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son." When—but not until—that word is spoken, when a man or woman is at once honest with himself or herself, then, but not till then, the path of hope is once more open. It is a rough path, which must be trodden with bleeding feet, but the way is homewards, Godwards, and the end is peace.

(2) But once more let us notice, though it must be very briefly, the peculiar nature of the sin which the Psalmist confesses. It is an offence, so it would seem, not so much against God as against his fellow man, and yet his words are emphatic. "Against Thee only have I sinned and

done this evil in Thy sight." We are accustomed to hear the service of man being set in opposition or contrast to the service of God. "The love of man," says an Ethical Society tract, "is better than the fear of God." Here is one of those shallow epigrams which deceive the unwary. The Psalmist looks deeper. He has learnt the great truth that he can only honour man by honouring the divine element in him, that in injuring man he has injured Him who is the only source of man's greatness. This is a truth which the Incarnation has brought, or ought to have brought, much nearer to us than it was to David, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto these, ye did it unto Me."

"But when your carters or your waiting vassals
Have done a drunken slaughter and defaced
The precious image of our dear Redeemer. . . ."

So Shakespeare puts the truth in his own language—"the precious image of our dear Redeemer." In vain shall we speak of the love of man until we have learnt that lesson. The love of humanity! What is this humanity which we are bidden to love! See it in all its meanness and weakness—see it as it is dissected and ridiculed by the awful genius of Swift in the last book of "Gulliver's Travels"—and what wonder if we ask, shall I, can I, love such as these? If we are, as materialism tells us, but animals who, by some good fortune, some unexplained freak of nature, have become

more strong and cunning than any other animals, why should I do more than set my cunning against theirs to "struggle for existence"?—I will struggle for mine, not for theirs! But once grasp the truth proclaimed by the Incarnation—the divinity of man, if we may use the expression—the solidarity of the human race in Him who took our nature upon Him—then Humanity, defaced by all its sins and errors, wears a new aspect. My eyes are open and I see! This poor man, this weak woman, the instrument of my covetousness or my lust—the millions whom I have at least half despised—the backward races of the earth, hewers of wood and drawers of water—the broken wrecks of womanhood in our streets or reformatories—the sweated victims of toil—they fade away—and in their place there stands another Figure—awful, sublime, majestic—the Figure of their Brother, their Friend, their Avenger—and all my half-regrets and contemptuous pity are exchanged for one bitter cry of penitence: "Against Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight."

My brethren, we are approaching the season of Lent. It is the season of penitence. It is the time when we are bidden to examine ourselves, our lives and hearts, in the very presence of the Cross of Christ. Is there one of us who has no need of that solemn discipline? Is there one of us who may not be stirred to a deeper sense of all

his sins against God and Man by the sight of Him in whom both God and Man are represented ; and Who alone can show us the way of Pardon and of Peace, because “ the Lord laid upon Him the iniquity of us all ” ?

X

THE EMPTY HOUSE

“The last state of that man is worse than the first.”—
ST. LUKE xi. 26.

IF we seek the original meaning of these words, we shall probably find it in the history of the Jewish people, and their religious condition in the time of our Lord. At any rate, the common interpretation of these words, which, so far as I can see, may be the correct one, is as follows: The great sin of Israel in its early days had been the sin of idolatry. There was nothing at all surprising in that. When a half-civilized race is told to believe in an “unseen God,” we can all see what a strain it must have been upon their powers. The longing for some “outward and visible sign,” in itself so natural and lawful, was forbidden by stern laws, but it could not be wholly repressed; and again and again the nation broke out into some form of idolatry. But after the exile all was changed. The hard lesson had been learnt at last, and the house of Israel was swept clear of idolatry.

But with what result? Instead of the open idolatry, there was now an inward and spiritual formalism which was even further removed than the other from true and vital religion. And so nothing had been gained by the mere expulsion of evil. More subtle evils had taken the empty place. The last state of the nation was worse than the first.

This subject is one quite fitted for our consideration this morning, partly because it is suggested by the Gospel for the day, partly because, since the beginning of Lent—and especially last Sunday—I have been trying to insist on our obvious duty suggested by the season, viz. that of fighting sin, of expelling evil from our being, of clearing and purifying our hearts. But such a message from the pulpit, even if salutary or necessary, is in itself, as must have struck many of you, rather cold and uninspiring. Supposing we do expel this or that evil, shall we therefore be better men or women? Not necessarily so. The empty house is not necessarily an improvement on that in which an “unclean spirit” inhabited; it may even be preparing for a worse future. A merely negative reformation (if we may use such an expression) is insufficient. A ground that has been cleared of weeds does not on that account bear flowers; though specious in its order and tidiness, it may be preparing only for a ranker harvest and a viler crop. This is a lesson which is written very large

on all our history and experience. It is written, for instance, in our social life. We think of such a time as the "reign of the saints," in the seventeenth century in England. Then, in the opinion of many, England's house was swept and garnished. There were a few years in which, to all outward appearances, old evils of "chambering and wantonness," at any rate, seemed to be expelled altogether. But the reformation was not a real one. It set no new principle in the heart of the people. No new spirit filled the place of the old; and when the Restoration came, the old demon returned with "seven other spirits more wicked than himself." Society was not only no better, it was far worse, for its temporary cleansing. It is strange that in the face of this experience so many of our reformers still believe in using negative means of social reform. Let us suppose all the public-houses closed to-morrow; nay, more than that, let us suppose that by some universal application of a certain modern medicine, which is supposed to create a distaste for alcohol, such a distaste had been awakened throughout the nation. What would follow? "Heaven on earth" would seem to be the natural reply. For my own part, I am not prepared to admit that this country, by this process, would *necessarily* be one whit better than it is to-day. The nation, we admit, has hitherto put a great deal of energy into the consumption

and enjoyment of alcohol in public-houses ; it has spent much time in this fashion. All this energy would now be liberated—for what ? “ Oh, for good,” is the answer of our enthusiast. Ah ! that is the question. Must it *necessarily* be for good ? Suppose it takes the form of a feverish desire to make money ; a restless and incessant pursuit of gain ; an unrestrained ferocity of competition ; the worship of the bottle exchanged for the worship of the bank. It seems to me that such a change (which might very well occur) would not be unlike the history of Israel, when it passed from idolatry to hypocrisy—*i.e.* it might be only an exchange of the sins of the flesh for the sins of the spirit ; an intemperate and thriftless people (let us say) exchanged for a cruel and covetous one ; and in the one case as in the other it might well be said that “ the last state would be worse than the first.”¹

So, again, with religion. There are those who think they do God service by deriding or destroy-

¹ It may be interesting, as bearing on this argument, to quote the following words from a paper contributed by Dr. Ernst Almqvist, Professor of Hygiene at Stockholm, to the *Hygienischen Rundschau*—

“ Some persons who leave off alcohol become slaves to other vices which are no better. The greatest danger which threatens the northern people at the present moment is increasing unchastity. In provinces which have experienced a perceptible decline in drunkenness, there has been a rapid increase in immorality.”

ing what they call, what may be, religious superstitions. It is not, as a rule, difficult to do this. The spirit of ancient superstition in the various races of the East, and elsewhere, tends largely to disappear before the touch of modern civilization, even when there is no conscious effort to do this. Alike in India and in Africa, the old gods retire and depart, and what then? What have we done, but left the heart of a people "empty, swept and garnished"? It is a poor thing to destroy any religious faith—however false it may be—and to put nothing in its place. There is no more hopeless class—as all men of experience know—than that portion of any nation which has lost its old faith, and never found a new one. Its last state is worse than its first.

But come for a moment to individuals. The primary object of our Lord's parable, as we have said, seems to be this—to expose the danger and uselessness of what we may call the negative process of attacking sin rather than cultivating virtues. Is not this an element which is still somewhat neglected in the moral and spiritual training of the young? Is not religion still too often represented as an instrument for the extirpation of little faults, rather than as a means of entering into a fuller life? Serious efforts are made to exorcise the demons of lying and ill-temper; but when that has been accomplished—if it is

accomplished—are equally serious efforts made to fill the swept and garnished heart with the greater spirits of active benevolence and love? This is where so much moral and religious training seems to fail. But to leave children alone, and come to their elders, do we not often discern a similar process in them also? People sometimes think that they have expelled their sins, whereas they have really only exchanged them for others who have silently taken the place of the former tenant. The sins of youth, for instance, fervid and violent, are cleared out and cast away—with what result? too often only to be exchanged for the tamer, but more subtle sins of middle age; the youthful rashness of twenty has grown into the worldly wisdom of forty-five, prudent, cautious, suspicious, close-fisted—but who will say that the second state is better than the first? and, perhaps, there is a third stage to follow—a grasping and selfish old age, which has no sympathy with the virtues of youth, or its vices. The woman who has been somewhat flighty and extravagant in her youthful days has learnt to know the error of her ways; twenty, thirty years later you will hardly know her, she has changed so much: but is she more of a saint than she was before?

“O, I see thee old and formal, fitted to thy petty part,
With a little hoard of maxims, preaching down a daughter’s
heart.”

It were useless to multiply instances, they are so common and so familiar: the "reformed" young man has become, it may be, something of a prig; the converted drunkard, perhaps, reappears as the intolerant Pharisee; and the root of all the failures is the same. The notion that if faults are expelled, no further effort is needed; that no better spirit need be substituted; that, somehow or another, we shall fade or age into goodness; that when the house is "swept and garnished," all the work is done.

But it may be contended that these are rather unfair instances. It does not (it will be said) necessarily follow that when some obvious evils are expelled from any life, their place will be filled by others, and perhaps graver ones, "seven demons worse than the first." There may be such a thing as a character without very serious faults, even if it has no striking virtues. Let us, for the sake of argument, grant the possibility of such an alternative; but are we usually in such a case in a much more satisfactory condition than we were before? When we think of the comparatively faultless people that we know, can we honestly say that they represent a type of a character which has in any way approached, or is approaching, the "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"? "Is approaching": that is the real point; that is the real weakness of the negative process in character-making, that while it can achieve certain

obvious results, it cannot do more. It stops short at a certain point. It is strictly finite, limited, like Wordsworth's philosopher—

“One to whose smooth-rubbed soul can cling
Nor form nor feeling, great or small,
A reasoning, self-sufficient thing,
An intellectual all in all.”

And even if it is not this, it has its “bounds which it cannot pass.” But the very note of the positive process is that it holds out the possibility of infinite progress. It may be, at any particular time, far more faulty than the other character of which we are speaking—it may have faults and failures, glaring and obvious—but the principle of *life* is there. There is a divine spirit in the house. It has its note of aspiration; and it is not in what we have accomplished, but in what we aspire to do and to be that there is the promise of true goodness. It is, in short, the difference which Browning has noticed between Greek and Christian art; the one finished, flawless in its own fashion; the other faulty, aspiring, infinite in its possibilities.

“To-day's brief passion limits their range,
It seethes with to-morrow for us and more,
They are perfect—how else? They shall never change.
“We are faulty! why not? we have time in store.
The Artificer's hand is not arrested
With us; we are rough hewn, no wise polished,
They stood for our copy, and once invested
With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.”

Here, then, we may find for ourselves a thought for the season we are now observing. Let us not be content with a merely negative Lent. If there is the negative side—as there may still be, in the driving out of the unclean spirit—let us try to fill its place with some active principle. It is something to put aside for a little while the frivolity which usually consumes so much of our time and energies; but the mere absence of frivolity does not by itself do much; let its place be taken by some strenuous study—that is one of the best things we can do,—or some sort of active benevolence. It is something if we can break the chain of idleness and selfishness by a process of rigorous self-discipline and the sacrifice for awhile of even lawful luxuries: yet it would be silly to suppose that fasting by itself tends to improve our tempers and dispositions; instead of self-love that must be substituted the positive love of God and man. So in the pages of the New Testament the negative and the positive always go hand in hand. “Love not the world,” is one side of the matter: “Set your affections on things above,” is the other. “Walk in love,” says to-day’s epistle, “as Christ also loved us and give Himself for us.” Here, indeed, is in a sentence, the best work of Lent: it is to feel more delight and respond more quickly to that great love of God which has its highest manifestation in the passion of our Lord Jesus

Christ. In the love of God and of man which He has made possible, we shall find the purpose of life which not only expels evils, but has in itself the promise and power of greater things—the egg in which lies the song of summer days; the seed which contains the harvest that is to come; that harvest of which the Apostle says, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be!”

XI

DYING TO LIVE

“And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee.”—ST. MATT. xviii, 9.

THERE is and there can be (according to our Lord) for all men but one supreme end and aim—to “enter into life.” To “enter into life” means (if we may attempt to define the expression) to enter into conscious and purposeful fellowship with God : first, here ; and then, hereafter. This is the supreme aim ; and all that interferes with it—even though it be good in itself, as it often is—must be ruthlessly sacrificed. Christ drives His counsel home in His own striking and even startling fashion. “If thine hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off and cast them from thee . . . and if thine eye offend thee—cause thee to stumble—pluck it out and cast it from thee ; it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.”

It is clear that this conception of our Lord's is opposed to two widely contrasted ideals. (1) It

is opposed to *asceticism*, in the more common use of that word. For it is evident that while our Lord regards the possession of "two eyes" or "two feet" as good in itself, and only counsels their sacrifice for the sake of something better, asceticism regards the sacrifice as in itself desirable and praiseworthy. Our Lord would prefer that we should use and enjoy all our faculties; that the world should be full of men with keen eyes and strong arms; asceticism would regard the one-eyed or the one-armed man as superior to normal and healthy human beings; it would exult in a maimed and mutilated humanity. The history of asceticism (in this sense) is, indeed, one of the most melancholy and degrading that can be imagined. St. Simon Stylites on his pillar becomes the ideal man; and the sentiment which the poet has placed in his mouth represents very fairly the ascetic ideal—

"Let this avail, just, dreadful, mighty God,
This not be all in vain, that thrice ten years,
Thrice multiplied by superhuman pangs
A sign betwixt the meadow and the cloud,
Patient on this tall pillar I have borne
Rain, wind, frost, heat, hail, damp, and sleet and snow."

All this sounds very far away; and yet, even with us, here in England, there has often been a kind of narrow piety which deliberately excluded whole departments of life—which despised or neglected art or literature or music, or any intellectual culture, as

unworthy the consideration of Christians ; it exulted in going about and pointing to its one arm or one eye.

(2) And, on the other hand, it is equally opposed to what is sometimes called "æstheticism." *Æstheticism* proclaims that the main object of man is to see and to feel. It declares that art is free, and must be free, from all moral considerations. It professes to worship the beautiful—the eye must see, both eyes must see, all that is to be seen, whether they "offend," "cause one to stumble," or no. A few years ago there was a set which preached this Gospel with unceasing enthusiasm and effrontery. To worship beauty—to see all that was to be seen—to enjoy fulness of emotion—was declared to be its creed. It repudiated moral considerations in theory, and very often ended by neglecting them in practice. Its aim—preserved at all costs—was to have two eyes and two hands—to enjoy what it would call a "full and complete life."

Now let us be quite sure that the religion of Christ is no enemy to Art or Culture. The service of beauty, the delight in it, the longing for it, it recognizes as one of the "good gifts and perfect gifts which come down from"—to use St. James's beautiful phrase—"the Father of Lights." "Beyond what is useful and true and good, there clings to the soul of man the idea of beauty."¹ Christ Himself encourages us to see the beauty of the

¹ Dean Church ("Sermons").

world. "Consider the lilies of the field: they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." The Apostle whom we think of, rightly or wrongly, as the least susceptible to æsthetic influences, holds before the eyes of his disciples the prospect of an eternal loveliness, "who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body." "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

But while the religion of Christ finds full scope—in its teaching and in its practice: in architecture, in stained glass windows, in the music of the Church—for the love of beauty to find its expression even in worship, it has never been forgetful of the awful danger which may beset, and often has beset, those who make the pleasure of the senses, even in their most refined forms, the great end of life. "We know too well," says one writer,¹ "how much beauty there is on earth which has turned against Him who made it. There is the beauty which is wrecked and ruined; there is beauty which betrays and kills; beauty which is the perverter, the destroyer. The innocent brightness of the child's beauty seems as if nothing could impair it; a few years pass, and that same face is still beautiful, but with a tempting and fatal beauty,

¹ Dean Church ("Sermons").

the mistress, the ally, and the minister of vice. So, also, Art has sometimes used its mighty gifts, and may use them still, not only carelessly, but on the side of evil; to ensnare, to corrupt, to tempt man to admire through the snare of beauty what is base and bad, what left the stain of defilement behind. Art, and not only philosophy, has been in past times procuress to the lords of hell." And what is true of Art, as a whole, is true, of course, of certain kinds of literature. There are writers who profess to use their eyes—to see things as they are—to "be true to life"; to "see life as it is." Often, no doubt, they do see a great deal; often they are clear-sighted enough. They give us pictures of certain sides of life—they show us how some men and women do live, how they feel; and there are those who read these books because they do not wish to be "narrow" or "puritanical"; because they want to see "all sides," and not to be doomed to a goody-goody literature; and they read them—but is the effect always the best, the most healthy? "Your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit herself, and then gave unto her husband . . . and the eyes of them both were opened . . ." but did they enter into life, or into death? And

when we speak of entering into life—seeing life—may it not sometimes be entering into death—entering into corruption?

This, at any rate, is what the Christian religion says. It says that a full life is a good thing, but a sound life is a better; and that to have a sound life—a healthy life—to “see salvation”—we must, if necessary, be prepared to sacrifice some of the fulness. And this is a question I would urge on you all to-day. It is a question for Lent. For what is Lent? Lent, some will say, is a time for striving against sin. That is only a partial and unsatisfactory answer. All seasons are or must be that. No; Lent is emphatically the time for considering what must be sacrificed if we are to attain to the true end—perfection of character—if we are to enter into life. Lent is called a Fast; and what does fasting mean? Not abstaining from sin—“fasting from sin,” to use the phrase of some foolish preachers—but readiness to surrender the lower for the sake of the higher; the readiness to curtail life—to narrow it, if you will; to cut off the foot, to pluck out the eye; because it is better having one eye to enter into life, than having two eyes to enter into hell fire.

And so we may well examine ourselves at this time on these things. “All parts of our natures,” says one writer,¹ “were made by God. The best

¹ Bishop Gore.

thing is that we should be able fully to exercise all our faculties ; but we must be safe at the centre before we can be free at the circumference. Whatever exposes us to temptation that is too strong for us must at any cost be abandoned. This principle is easy of application to questions that are constantly cropping up. Is it right to go to the theatre, or to this or that theatre? Is this or that particular art or literature legitimate or justifiable? Now, to a certain extent these questions can be answered on general principles. But it does not at all follow that because on general principles I can justify this or that drama, or this or that literature, or this or that art, that therefore it is justified for *me*. That is quite another question. The question for me is, what is its effect on me? Does it stimulate in me what is bad? Does it put my moral nature to a disadvantage? Does it, in fact, tempt me into sin?" And if so, must I not be prepared to sacrifice it? That is the question, and we can only answer it, of course, by knowing and watching ourselves. We do not want to narrow or limit our lives, but for the sake of our characters—to "enter into life"—must we not sometimes do so? It is a question for all. Perhaps, in some respects, it is a question especially for women. The lives of women were once very much restrained and restricted. They were surrounded by prohibitions. They were accorded an

inferior education. Their duty was supposed to lie solely in the sphere of their own homes. They were to be good housewives. All is now changed, and no doubt rightly. The intellectual and artistic and æsthetic interests of women are certainly not less than those of men. On the whole, perhaps, if one may say so, they are larger. Women take in literature and pictures, and music and the drama a keener interest than the majority of men. But is there never loss as well as gain? The unrestrained access to certain classes of modern literature and drama—does it always help to a better as well as a broader life? It is good that women should be “cultured”; it is better still that they should be pure in heart. It is best of all that they should be both; and there are hundreds in which these are combined; but, if ever the choice has to be made, believe, ah! believe, that no sacrifice is too great to save the life from evil and the heart from corruption.

It is better to “enter into life.” For notice, in conclusion, that whatever the sacrifice required in the present, the end is to be a fuller, not an emptier existence. If the lower is to go, it is only that the higher may be preserved. “Whosoever will lose his life shall save it.” At this time of the year this great teaching seems to come to us more, perhaps, than at any other season. Once more the springtime is with us; once more in tree and

bud the life of Nature leaps joyfully before our eyes; the time of the singing of birds is near, and the flowers, ere long, will "paint the meadows with delight." The joy, the thrill of life is all around; and then we enter the House of God. The Church is keeping her Lent, and before our eyes there is the pale, wan form of the Crucified. Is this, then, the message of the Christ to the world? Is it, after all, a message of death? Nay, He dies that He may live! He lays down His life that He may take it up again, fuller, richer, more glorious than before, even though there be still wound-prints in feet and hands and side! He liveth (in the Apostle's words), He liveth unto God! And if we may only "live unto God," we must be prepared to die not only unto sin, but, if need be, unto many other things. We must be prepared, if need be, to pluck out one eye, if only with purged though partial vision we may "behold God's presence in righteousness," and waking up, after His likeness, "be satisfied with it."

XII

DEATH IN LIFE

“For the end of these things is death.”—ROM. vi. 21.

WE are all of us familiar with the great contrast that appears again and again in the pages of Holy Scripture. We may call it in a word, the contrast between life in death and death in life. On the one side there is the paradox which, in a dozen different forms is always meeting us, viz. “He that will lose his life shall find it.” “Die to live.” That is what it comes to—“Die to live.” And so, to St. Paul, for instance, the Death and Resurrection of our Lord are something far more than an event which once happened in the history of the world. They are, so to speak, the most wonderful and significant visible illustration of the great eternal principle—that men must die to the lower to live to the higher life. “For in that He died, He died unto sin once, but in that He liveth He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye yourselves also to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

And so for every Christian there is to be the repetition, in the spiritual sphere, of Christ's death and resurrection. We know how frequently the thought occurs in St. Paul's writings. All his language is coloured by it. "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized unto His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." "If ye then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above." We need not multiply quotations; the thought is the same: "Die to live." And, as these quotations show us, the moment which is regarded as marking the death and resurrection of the believer was the moment of baptism. No doubt in the earliest days, the symbolism of baptism was much more striking than it is with ourselves. We see the believer led out, perhaps, to some running stream, and as he is plunged beneath the stream the baptizer seems to say: "Die to the old, live to the new." Behind him, in the water, he leaves his sins—the old impure life of his abandoned heathenism. He is born again to a new life. The beautiful custom of infant baptism springs from a true instinct of the Church; but, no doubt, it has entailed some loss of vivid symbolism; yet to all

baptized persons the appeal comes reminding them that their true life begins with a death. "Likewise reckon ye yourselves also to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

"Die to live"—any sacrifice to possess the true life. So the Christian appeal always comes. So our Lord is always saying. He speaks as the good physician advising even the most painful operation, that life may be preserved. "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee; if thy foot offend thee, cut it off; if thy eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better to enter into life blind or maimed—with one eye or one foot—rather than having two eyes or two feet to lose the whole; to be cast into hell fire." This is His message to the young man who had great possessions. To others the young man seemed all that a man should be; the envied, no doubt, of his class and kind; to Him he was a patient suffering from a deadly disease. The Good Physician sees only one way of saving him. He advises a painful operation: "Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and come, follow Me." To the young man it sounded like a sentence of death, the surrender of all that made life worth living. And so, in a sense, it was. "Die," but die to live. Out of this death should spring a new life, greater and stronger than the old; the life of those who having nothing possess

all things, "as dying, and, behold, they live." And so the language of Christ is always the same. To Him the mere drawing of breath is not living. He saw dead and dying men all about Him, where others saw nothing but life and activity. "This do," He would say, "this do and thou shalt live." "If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments."

And notice here the contrast between the teaching of our Lord, and all that is called "asceticism." Asceticism values pain and loss for its own sake. It sees merit in the plucking out of the eye, or the cutting off the hand. Its ideal, one might almost say, would be a world of maimed and mutilated men and women. It regards joy as an offence against the Lord of life and love. But if Christ advises sacrifice it is not that men may live poorer, but that they may live richer lives, not that they may die, but that out of death may spring life: "I am come (not that they may die), but that they might have life, and have it more abundantly."

That there is one side of the Christian paradox, "Life in death": and on the other side, we see "death in life": death, where men see life; again and again when men think that they are living, it sees them dying; when they think that they are seeking life, it seems to say "the end of these things is death."

Take some familiar examples of what I mean. "If," says the Apostle, "if ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." There is the first and most obvious instance of death in life, the life of the drunkard and the sensualist. The drunkard thinks that he is seeking "life"—he wants life, something more quick and strong and vivid than he possesses, and he thinks that he can get it in the excitement of strong drink. He drinks and dies (I am speaking, of course, now of excess, not the lawful and moderate use of stimulants). He drinks and dies. This does not mean that he kills himself in the ordinary sense of the term. This may or may not be; but he dies an inward death, far worse than any bodily dissolution. His brain is clouded; his conscience is dulled; his sense of truth, his capacity for love and unselfishness are slowly and surely undermined. He is altered not so much in body as in spirit. An awful, hideous change passes over the whole character of the man. It is not the change of years—they come and do their work by the will of God—it is not the change made by years that strikes an agony, too deep for tears, into the heart of his wife—who contrasts him with the man she once knew—the man who in the springtime of life won her love. No, it is something far more hopeless than that; it is a moral and spiritual death

that is creeping over him: moral and spiritual death, rottenness, corruption. And what is true of drunkenness is true, still more true, of other and viler forms of carnal indulgence. Over all such are written the words of the Apostle, "The end of these things is death"—not life—though life be sought so eagerly—but that inward death—the decay of all the higher functions of the soul—which is the inevitable doom of those who live "after the flesh"—death in life.

This, I say, is the most common and familiar illustration of the truth which we are trying to enforce. But there are others, less striking and impressive, yet not less true. Do you remember, for instance, the Apostle's description of a certain kind of woman, "She who liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." It seems at first sight, a hard, a severe sentence. It is not the condemnation of pleasure. The joy of life is good—the joy, the exhilaration of youth, for instance—all that rush and flow of high spirits that is found present, shall we say, at an Eton and Harrow match—with all its tumult and shouting—

"I hear the call ye blessed creatures make,
One to another!"

It is like the poet's dream on a May morning, "when earth and sea give themselves up to jollity." But there is a nemesis even on innocent pleasures

too long and eagerly enjoyed to the neglect of life's sterner duties—on pleasures which have become not the accompaniment, but the end of living. Slowly in the pleasure-seeking life, death, not life, works its way—the doom is pronounced. Let boys and girls laugh and live! But when the girl passes into the middle-aged woman, jaded, wearied by the scramble for pleasures which please less and less as time goes on—or the boy shouting at a cricket match becomes the man seeking only to amuse or please himself, and ends in the elderly person grumbling in his club, and rich in curses over the ineffectual golf, which has been his one serious employment, we see the working of the same law: for when the pursuit of trifles so occupies the thoughts and energies of men and women that their intellectual and spiritual faculties are neglected—and by neglect are stunted and atrophied—may we not say of them that, even amongst the stirring incidents of life, in the excitements and pleasures of a London season, they are “dead while they live.”

But, indeed, at the root of all these lives—whatever may be their particular manifestation—there is the same deadly disease of which our Lord speaks, when he says, “He that will save his life shall lose it.” It is, in one form or another, the disease of selfishness. Men seek life for themselves, and they find that they have chosen death.

And if they are to live, it must be not by living, but by dying to themselves. Two great novelists have painted the same picture, and drawn the same moral in two well-known instances—"The Christmas Carol" of Dickens, and the "Silas Marner" of George Eliot. There, in each case, we see first of all the "death in life." Each gives us the picture of an old man whose nature has been destroyed, whose heart has been shrivelled by a selfish pursuit of his own interests. In each it is the story of the slow dying of a soul which has sought to save itself. But into each life there comes a new experience; to the one by a vivid dream, which reveals to the man what he really is; to the other by the love of a little child. In the one case suddenly, in the other, with more skill, gradually, we see the melting of the ice which had bound the spirit in a deadly embrace. The stream of life flows afresh. And the end is expressed in the words of St. John, "We have passed from death to life because we love the brethren."

"The end of these things is death." The end. It is not always easy at first to detect the beginnings of the fatal diseases of the soul, those diseases which end in ruin and decay. Here is a thought for those of you who are still young. The little selfishnesses of youth are easily forgiven—perhaps too easily—but even you must take care of your souls, of your characters. You, too, must learn the

lesson. "He that will lose his life will save it." The beginning is almost imperceptible; but the "end of these things is death"—the death in life—which is the worst death of all. There is an awful and impressive passage in the "Inferno," which is, no doubt, familiar to many of you. It is in the XXXIII Canto, when Dante finds the Friar Alberigo de' Manfredi. The poet expresses his surprise at finding the friar there, since he had believed him to be alive on earth. The friar explains that though his body was on earth, his soul was in hell. And he points to another, in a similar case, Branca Doria, at his side.

"Now," answered I, "methinks thou mockest me,
 For Branca Doria never yet hath died,
 But doth all natural functions of a man,
 Eats, drinks, and sleeps, and putteth raiment on. . . ."

And so amongst us are those who "eat, drink, and sleep, and put raiment on," and yet are in the deepest sense, dead. They have ceased to pray; they have ceased to love. We may all come to this—to this death in life—and when we come to it, it is easy to believe in our own annihilation; just, as on the other hand, the spirit which is "alive unto God" is so conscious of fulness of life that it cannot believe in death at all. It has learned the meaning of the words, "This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ

whom Thou hast sent"; and is persuaded that neither life nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate it from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

XIII

THE OLD AND THE NEW

“They were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.”—ACTS ix. 26.

HERE we see the meeting of two forces --the old and the new—in the Church of Christ. Let me briefly remind you of the circumstances. The conversion of Saul (which we celebrate again this week) had already taken place. He had seen Jesus by the way, and had surrendered to Him. He had preached Christ at Damascus. He had gone into retirement into Arabia. He had returned to Damascus, preaching “boldly in the name of Jesus.” What the substance of his preaching was at this time we are not told. We may well believe, however, that even then he had begun to put forth that wider conception of Christianity which was destined to shock and surprise those who conceived it to be only a superior form of Judaism. At any rate, his preaching aroused the greatest fury among the Jews of Damascus. They lay in wait for him and pressed him so hard that his friends were compelled to resort to a method of escape which

seems to have exposed him to considerable ridicule in after years. He was let down in a basket from a window by the wall, and thus escaped their hands. He then made his way to Jerusalem and sought to join himself to the disciples; but "they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple."

Let us not be too hard on the elder Apostles—a Peter or a James—who regarded the new convert with a certain measure of fear and suspicion. After all, was it not natural? His record was a bad one. He had persecuted the brethren, breathing out threats and slaughter against them. He had haled men and women into prison, and, as he himself confessed in after years, "had thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." And then there had come a sudden and wonderful change. There was some talk of a vision by the way: a vision of Jesus Christ: but who could put faith in these things? It might be, after all, but an idle tale. Those who could really speak with authority about Christ were those who had known Him in His earthly life and had "eaten and drunk with Him when He rose from the dead." They were the heads of the Church, and instructed others in the faith; and here was a man who had received no regular instruction; one who claimed to have "visions" and "revelations." The whole matter looked very suspicious, and who could tell how far the man

was to be trusted? Might he not be acting a part after all? And so, in short, "they believed not that he was a disciple."

It is difficult for us to say what might have happened at this crisis, whether or not the Church might have turned its back on Saul, refused to acknowledge him, declined to accept his services, and driven him into some lonely paths of his own. But in the providence of God, the instrument for his preservation was at hand: "Barnabas took him." This is not the first mention of Barnabas in the Acts. He has already been introduced as a "son of consolation"; elsewhere he is described as "a good man, full of the Holy Ghost." Ah! these Barnabases! what need has the Church of them in every age; these "sons of consolation," and reconciliation; these good men whose delight is to "seek peace and ensue it"; to bring men nearer to one another; who never speak the words that exasperate and embitter, that divide and estrange; who know that the truth is larger than their conception of it, and would, if possible, reconcile the old and the new. It was such a man who appeared at the right moment and saved Saul for Christianity. "But Barnabas took him and brought him to the Apostles and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."

And the action of Barnabas prevailed. It was infinitely to the credit and glory of men like James and Peter, with the old Jewish traditions and prejudices, with the claims they could have of long service, of personal knowledge of Christ after the flesh, that they were able to receive Saul—this strong unknown force—who had come to Christianity by such a different way to theirs, and who was seething with ideas and conceptions which must have seemed strange and even revolutionary ; it was infinitely to their credit that they dared to welcome him. We should have liked to hear what he and Peter said to each other in those fifteen days when they abode together in Jerusalem. It was not all smooth sailing, as we know. There were difficulties in after days. Probably Paul was not always easy to manage and control. It must have wanted all the tact and temper and courtesy of men like Peter and James to deal with this new and strong element in their midst. But we know how gallantly they laid aside much that it must have been very difficult for them to surrender ; and how finally the accession of Saul—Saul, the persecutor, Saul, the convert—was to strengthen and enrich the Catholic Church.

I have recalled this story at some length because it always seems to contain thoughts and warnings which it is well for us to consider. Again and

again in the history of the Church the "old" and "new" forces have met together; they have been brought into sudden contact. The old has been afraid of the new, and has refused for a while, at least, to believe that it could ever be anything but an enemy. And, again and again, we may say that the hope of the Church has been not in the extreme men, refusing to admit any fresh light, but rather in the Barnabases—the men "full of the Holy Ghost and of faith," who have taken the new forces by the hand and have striven to reconcile them to the older belief. Thus at one time the Church found herself face to face with Greek Philosophy. Many of the Fathers condemned all Philosophy as a foe of Christianity; they regarded it as opposed to divine truth: to be abhorred, rejected. Others, like Clement or Origen, boldly embraced it, and ended by making what had seemed to be the enemy into the servant of the Church. Or, again, at the time of the Renaissance, there was the new learning—all the rediscovered treasures of the classical world. Old-fashioned churchmen shook their heads; and many of the humanists, intoxicated by the new wine, showed very little respect to the Church. It was the Mores, the Colets, the Erasmuses, who played the part of Barnabas, refused to be "afraid" of the new learning, believed that it might also be "a disciple," and found it a place in the Church.

Or, again, we might be reminded of the attitude of the Church towards physical science, to the discoveries of a Galileo in one age or of a Darwin in another. For a considerable time the representatives of the Church were undoubtedly afraid of "evolution" and "believed not that it could be a disciple." There were theologians who roundly declared that the new science and Christianity were incompatible. They set "evolution" on one side and texts from Genesis on another, and bid men choose between the two. But here again the Barnabases are not wanting at the critical time. If we mention any name, we might select that of the late Aubrey Moore, of Oxford—a man profoundly versed both in theology and science—as a theologian of the Barnabas type, who was always ready to take "science by the hand" and to contend that the theory of evolution, far from being opposed to Christianity, would in the end strengthen and enrich it; and if we hear less to-day than we once heard of the opposition between Religion and Science—which ought rather to be called the opposition between ecclesiastical men and scientific men—it is largely owing to the action and wisdom of those theological Barnabases, who are willing to believe that truth may sometimes come in a strange and unexpected form. And may it not be the same to-day with what is known as "higher criticism"?

We are told sometimes that the higher criticism is "destructive" and "revolutionary." And so, no doubt, Saul must have seemed to many of his day, "destructive" and "revolutionary." Yet if he destroyed the old lingering Judaism of the disciples, it was only to enlarge and enrich the Church. Our duty to the higher criticism is not to be "afraid" of it, not to call it by names, but rather to listen to its message, to find it, if possible, a place in the Church. At any rate, we must be careful. We know how often the orthodoxy of the day has been rash and blind. At one time it was Bishop Temple, at another Frederick Denison Maurice, whom it "believed not to be a disciple." Such instances may be warnings, when we are inclined too hastily to condemn what, perhaps, we do not quite understand.

And may we not find here, also, a warning to individuals? We are reminded that Christian experience is not always of just the same type; that we are not to distrust the experiences of others, or to "believe not that they are disciples," simply because they have not been quite the same as our own. That was the mistake made by the English Church of the eighteenth century; it had its own way of being Christian, its settled and established way; it could not understand a Wesley, with what seemed his eccentric and unauthorized experiences, his strange "visions and revelations."

We ourselves are tempted, are we not, to make the same mistake? We have come to Christ by one way. We have been baptized into His Church, taught her creeds, continued steadfast in our prayers and communions. We have walked along the Church's road, and the sun of faith which rose upon our childhood shines on our path to-day. But there are some who come to Christ only after struggles and convulsions. And are we not sometimes tempted to disparage those who speak of "sudden" or "sensible" conversions: who claim that they have experiences of which we know nothing? But we must try to avoid that mistake. Doubtless men have very various religious experiences, and we must even try to understand the position of those who tell us—though they seem to us perhaps to be nothing better than enemies of the Church and of the Faith—even when, perhaps, many may label them "infidels" or "agnostics" — that they too have, nevertheless, in their own fashion, had a vision of Christ; they have seen Jesus by the way. It will be well if we English Churchmen, with the wisdom of a Peter or James, seek not whom we may exclude, but whom we may include, in the fellowship of the Church.

These are some of the considerations which our subject to-day suggests to me; but there is

one other, not so obvious, which I cannot forbear just touching before I leave you. In the last week¹ we have been in the midst of political turmoil. We have been, I suppose I may say, amazed, startled by all that has happened. We seem to be standing at a crisis in the history of our country. It is not merely a change of Government—a change from a Government calling itself Conservative to a Government calling itself Liberal; that by itself may mean but little. But what we see now is a sudden rush of entirely new forces, claiming an active part in the control and direction of our national life. There they stand, these new forces of “labour” or whatever we choose to call it, fresh, strong, eager—with a tremendous power of their own, whether for good or evil we have yet to see. What are we to do with this Saul who “assays to join himself” to those classes which have hitherto controlled the destinies of our country? I suppose I may say, without offence, that a very large number, the great majority of my hearers, may be said, like the disciples of old, to be “afraid of him,” or at least to regard him with suspicion and dislike. That is a natural feeling: an inevitable one. There is no denying that the sudden appearance of new strong forces—all these thousands and

¹ This sermon was preached just after the general election of 1906.

thousands who have, all at once, as it were, come up from below, cast off their apathy, and recorded their votes with such startling energy and directness—must be regarded with a certain measure of apprehension even by those who are by no means prejudiced against them. We seem to see before us one clear and distinct danger—danger of a class war: a struggle between the “haves” and the “have nots” for the possession of the kingdom. It is not for me to enter into political questions, but this I will venture to say, that our great hope at this time lies not on the extremes of either side, neither in those men who call all property “robbery,” nor in those who bitterly denounce democracy as something “lying in the evil one,”—but rather in those moderating influences of men on either side who will try to understand each other; who are prepared to lay aside many of their prejudices, and to strive together for the perfection of our national life. It is easy to speak rash and bitter words at this time; many are doing it and will do it; but England is larger than any of her parties; she is the mother of all her children; and “blessed are the peacemakers”! Now, if ever, we have need of the Christian temper, we have need of those who, like Barnabas, will strive to lead men nearer to one another with the old appeal, “Sirs, ye are brethren.”

XIV

THE UNJUST STEWARD

“There was a certain rich man, which had a steward ; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.”—ST. LUKE xvi. 1.

It is not easy to give a consistent interpretation of the Parable of the Unjust Steward. How are we to take such words as “The Lord commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely,” or “I say unto you, make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness” ? It may be, of course, that our Lord means to say, “Be as shrewd in business, in your use of the world’s good things, as worldly men are, but for another reason. Even the unjust steward can teach you something ; he used his opportunities to make friends. You too can so use the ‘unrighteous mammon’ ; you can so use your money, for instance, in acts of mercy and charity, that those whom you have befriended may meet you at Heaven’s gate and lead you into everlasting habitations.” But such an interpretation is hardly consistent with the words which follow—“He

that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" in which the steward is held up rather for blame than for praise, and as a warning rather than an example. It may be, indeed, that we hear a grave and solemn irony in the Lord's seeming commendation of the steward, "The Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely;" and "I say unto you, make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." "See the shrewdness of worldly men," He seems to say, "and how well it pays. Doubtless such shrewdness, which is so successful in this world, must be equally profitable for that which is to come."

In any case, however, it is not possible to overcome the difficulties and apparent inconsistencies of the parable, as it stands before us. Our better plan this morning will be to deal with what is plainly intelligible, in considering the action of the unjust steward. His sin was two-fold; (1) in treating his Lord's possessions as his own; and (2) in demoralising the tenants by making them partners in his guilt, when he allowed them to take their Lord's "hundred" and write it down to "four-score."

To whom then was the parable spoken in the first

place? Doubtless, to the Scribes and Pharisees. Let us remember that Christ was at this time in contact with them, and the charge that He brought against them was that, to serve their own ends, to gain favour and popularity, they deliberately lowered the requirements of God; they lowered, that is, the moral and religious standards, which, as teachers, they should have guarded and preserved.

That the Pharisaical Scribes acted in this way we have abundant evidence in the words of Christ Himself. See, for instance, how they treated the ten commandments. The fifth commandment said—"Honour thy father and thy mother," and the duty of honouring parents may well have been supposed to include the sustaining of them in weakness and old age. But this was a duty irksome to many then, as it is now; how could they evade it? The Pharisaical Rabbi made the process easy. A man might dedicate his property to God, and in this case it could not be diverted to the support of parents. True, the property though dedicated, need not at once be put to religious uses; that might be deferred, even, if necessary, to a man's death,—or, indeed, it might never be paid at all. But still it was "Korban." And so, by a fictitious dedication, the requirements of the fifth commandment might wholly be evaded. What was this but to take God's hundred and write down fourscore?

And, as with the fifth commandment, so also with the seventh. The Mosaic Law on the subject of divorce was somewhat vague. It might be interpreted in more ways than one. It was the part of one school among the Pharisees so to "loose" the law that the possibility of divorce should be extended as widely as possible. This laxity of interpretation commended them to many. A man like Herod Antipas was the firm friend of the Pharisees. He found their liberal teaching very much to his liking. It was left to John the Baptist to assert the full requirements of the moral law. He refused to write down God's hundred. It is, perhaps, in the light of these facts that we are to read the words of Our Lord which occur in St. Luke's Gospel soon after the Parable, and which appear at first sight to be so strangely misplaced: "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery."

And as in those days, so in all times, there has been a wide-spread tendency among religious teachers and church officials to lower the requirements of religion and morality in the hope of "making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness;" of increasing their own power and authority among men. What else, for instance, did the

system of indulgences come to, but to this? When Tetzel perambulated Germany with his pardons hot from Rome he was practically (whatever may have been the original theory of indulgences)—he was practically offering forgiveness of sins on far easier terms than the gospel offered it—a forgiveness without penitence—a forgiveness for money down. The unjust stewards of Rome substituted for the demands of the Gospel, certain lower conditions of their own. The whole situation was summed up by a cynic, in the words, “God desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he shall pay and live.” It was Luther, as we all know, who protested against the practice, and yet Luther himself, on a later occasion, acted in a precisely similar spirit. The Landgrave Philip of Hesse was a stout Protestant, with a taste for bigamy. He submitted to Luther the question—“Could a Christian have two wives?” There are few things more painful to read than the reply of Luther and his friends to this question. On the one side was the Christian law of marriage; on the other was the will of the Landgrave, and the danger of losing his support. Eventually the required permission was given. The Landgrave was bidden to take his bill and write fourscore.

But the most notorious examples of this spirit are to be found, perhaps, in the history of the Jesuits. The Jesuits are always associated in our

minds with "casuistry." Now the word "casuistry," in itself need have no evil connotation. "Casuistry" is simply the science of applying general moral principles to particular cases; a good and sound science of "casuistry," far from being contemptible, might be of great service to us in many of the perplexities of the present day. But "casuistry" with the Jesuits degenerated into the science of applying moral and religious principles in such a way as to make them as easy as possible to the faithful. No doubt their motives were not always bad. They argued (as many have argued since) that, human nature being what it is, you cannot expect too much from the majority of people. If the rule of religion and morality is to be borne at all, it must be made as light as possible, otherwise there will be the danger of its being rejected altogether. Men will not pay 100, but they may be induced to pay 80 or 50. At the same time, no doubt, they hoped to make friends of those whom they accommodated in this manner. The practical results of their preaching are exposed again and again with crushing power in the Provincial Letters of Pascal. Here are one or two instances :—

"Understand then," says Pascal, "that their object is by no means the corruption of morals. On the other hand, they are equally remote from entertaining a single-minded aim for their reformation ;

this they would hold to be impolitic. Their reasoning is as follows: They think so favourably of themselves that they believe it to be useful, and, so to speak, necessary for the interests of religion, that their reputation should stand high with all classes, and their sway be extended over every man's conscience. And as they see that severe and evangelical principles are most influential over some persons, they avail themselves of such where they judge the opportunity favourable. But knowing these principles to be not favoured by the great majority, their method is to relax them in favour of these latter; and then they are able to meet the tastes of all. For these reasons—having to deal with such variety of conditions, and even with entire nations differing so much from each other—it is found necessary to have casuists adapted to all these diversities. . . . By these methods they preserve their friends and are protected from their enemies.”

Or again—

“It is well known, sirs, that according to the authority of the Church there are two precepts on the subject of alms: the one, to give of our superfluity for relieving the ordinary necessities of the poor; the other, to give of what is even necessary to ourselves in cases of extreme destitution. . . . As to superfluity, which is the most usual resource for the relief of the poor, that is entirely

got rid of by the tenet which I recited in my letter, viz., 'That which persons, moving in the world, retain for supporting their position in society, and that of their relatives, is not to be deemed superfluous. Therefore it can rarely happen that such persons, even of the most exalted rank—not excepting sovereigns—can be said to possess a superfluity.' You see, therefore, my fathers, that according to this definition no persons of an aspiring disposition are likely to suffer under a superfluity of possession ; and, by these means, almsgiving, in regard to the greater part of the world, is virtually abolished."

I have given these historical instances of the spirit of the " Unjust Steward " as having an interest of their own ; but let us beware of supposing the spirit belongs entirely to any past age. In these days, as in those, there is a very considerable body of people who practically say to the Church, " Make religion easy for us and we will accept it. Lower the requirements of the Gospel to suit the times in which we live, for the age is not a severe one. Let us take our bill and write fourscore, and we will be your very good friends." One notices instances of this spirit in many ways. Worship may be tolerable if music be good and sermons short. Or to take a very serious case, there is, as in the days of the Pharisees, what is called the

“marriage question.” Our Lord has laid down certain laws on the subject of marriage and divorce ; but this legislation (even when interpreted with all possible latitude) is felt by the world to be too high for its convenience. There is not, I suppose, a single Christian nation which, so far as its own marriage laws are concerned, even professes to accept His legislation ; some have torn it to fragments. As to how far the State may be justified for its own purpose in permitting a debased marriage code, I will not now discuss. That is a large question. But for the Church, at least, the course is clear. It is the duty of the Church to be true to her Lord. It is the duty of every individual Christian minister to refuse to lower Christ’s standard. People sometimes forget this. They come to us apparently supposing that the Church’s marriage law may be dispensed with by any individual priest on his own authority ; and if he declines to do so, he is declared not to be “liberal.” No doubt, the Steward was liberal in his own fashion ; but his liberality consisted in giving away what belonged to another. We do not wish to imitate him in this respect ; and if the choice lies between trying to maintain the Christian ideal and pleasing certain sections of modern society, we can only reply in the words of St. Paul : “It is required of stewards that a man be found faithful ; but with me it is a small thing that I

should be judged of you or of man's judgment. . . .
He that judgeth me is the Lord."

* * * * *

Or, again, to take another instance from common life. How far do we really make the ethical standards of the Gospel our own? Do we not, as a society, consent in substituting something else—something lower—for the high requirements which we find there? Consider such expressions as "good form" or "conduct worthy of a gentleman." Are there not many whose moral ideals are summed up under the expression "good form"? There was an Irish Archbishop of the eighteenth century who wrote a book entitled "The religion of a gentleman." I cannot pretend to be acquainted with its contents, but the title suggests a great deal. "Good form" and "gentlemanly conduct" really make up the religious and ethical system of a good many people who profess and call themselves Christians. Far be it for me to say that a reverence for "good form" is to be despised. It means something—sometimes a good deal—and is far better than no ideal at all. But the danger attending these substitutes for Christianity—for that is what they often become—is twofold. In the first place, the standards of good form are very variable from age to age. The conduct laid down as that of a "gentleman," which we find, for instance, in Lord Chesterfield's letters,

would now often be considered the conduct of people usually described by a brief monosyllable which I hesitate to utter in this place. And, in the next place, they are often grossly false and defective even in the present day. What are we to say, for instance, of the degrees of obligation attaching to "debts of honour" and debts due to tradesmen? Gambling losses must, forsooth, be paid on the danger of losing "honour"; but it is quite another matter with money due to the tailor or dressmaker, whose bills many of us find it so inconvenient to pay. These facts ought to warn us against the spurious imitations of Christian conduct, which cost us so much less than the original; they should warn us against taking the "hundred" of the Gospel and "writing it down fourscore."

It is, perhaps, in some such ways as these that we shall learn some, at least, of the lessons conveyed by the parable before us. There is, however, one other and very obvious truth of which it reminds us, and which I will briefly touch in conclusion. To all of us in this world there are committed certain "goods"—so much time—so much money—so much intellectual power—so much personal or social influence. We are tempted, like the steward, to regard all these as our private possessions; but it would be well if we remembered more often the question of the Apostle: "What hast thou that thou hast not

received?" In other words, we need a far deeper sense of stewardship—responsibility for our life and its varied powers and opportunities. Meeting, as we do to-day, at the extreme end of another London season, there are some questions which we should do well to ask ourselves. How have we been spending our time? Have our various social pleasures and excitements resulted in the neglect of prayers and duties? How have we spent our money? If we were to set in two parallel columns the sums spent on dresses and dinner parties—and those devoted to charity—how would the account look? How have we used our personal and social influence? Have we merely followed the multitude to do good or evil, or have we been on the side of honour and purity? Have we done anything to guide or strengthen (shall we say?) some young girl who finds herself for the first time in the pleasures, but also in the temptations, of the world? These are questions which we might try to answer when we have time to do so. For Life is a trust—and when Death comes, it comes—not as the final discharge of all our debts—but as the voice which says: "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward."

XV

ATHEISM

“The ungodly is so proud that he careth not for God : neither is God in all his thoughts.”—PSALM x. 4.

“The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”—PSALM xiv. 1.

IF any one will read the Psalms for to-day,¹ he will find that (with the exception of the first) they all have the same theme, and are treated in a similar manner. The theme is that which we find again and again in the Psalms, the constant source of wonder, and trouble, and perplexity, viz. : the apparent failure of God to protect His own servants and to justify His ways to man. Everywhere the “ungodly” are boasting and triumphing. The Psalmist complains of their prosperity, their security, their insolence, their deceit, their violence. Everywhere the good are defeated and suffering. It is clear, of course, that the Psalmist writes in evil days, when his country is vexed by foreigners and unbelievers—perhaps at some such period as that of the

¹ The 2nd of the month.

tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes. It is such times as these, times of public and private troubles, that try the faith of men, and make them restless and impatient; and the great problem, which is fought out in the Book of Job, is continually vexing the hearts of these singers whose utterances are included in the Psalter. Did God care or not? Is the whole world out of joint? The question was one especially difficult for the Psalmists, because they expected to see God justify Himself here and now, in the present world; because to them prosperity was still the great mark of the Divine favour. For of any life beyond this life, they had still, generally speaking, but a vague and dim conception. True, there are times when on them also there seems to dawn the glory of a beatific vision, "When I awake up after Thy likeness I shall be satisfied with it." But, generally speaking, death to them was "the shadow feared of man." The grave was the land where all things were forgotten by the silent and praiseless dead. Many and many a Christian has borne the ills of this world and of his own life with a patient resignation because he could look beyond all these to the life of the world to come—a rest remaining to the people of God. Of such a hope the Psalmists knew little; and yet let us note that though they might complain unto their God—though they used language which again and again seems to challenge

the Divine justice—though they would almost seem to be provoking the Most Highest to action—“Hath God forgotten to be gracious, and is His mercy clean gone for evermore?”—yet, in the end, it is always faith that is triumphant. They are sure that above all the trials and failures there is the Judge of all the world who will do right. “The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord’s seat is in heaven; the Lord sitteth above the waters; the Lord remaineth a King for ever.”

We love the Psalms because they speak the language of the human heart; because they utter so boldly and confidently the thoughts which arise in our own minds. There are still times when our faith seems to reel and stagger under the force of all the insoluble problems of human life; the undeserved suffering of men; the success of evil; the apparent failure of good. But though there are moments in which we still use the language of the Psalmist, let us never forget that we are no longer in the Psalmist’s case. The great question: “Does God care?” has received, for those who will accept it, has received its answer in the Incarnation. In the life, the death, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we find the answer—the only clue—to the perplexities and anomalies of human life,—the unseen God Himself entering into the sorrows and sufferings of humanity. There we behold the greatest defeat of goodness which the

world has ever witnessed, and its triumphant vindication. We may reject that Life and that Light—men can do so, as we know—but if we do so, the world is deprived of its great illumination. It is impossible, really, to measure the difference between the language of the Psalmists, even in their sunniest moods, and the faith which burns in the words of the Apostle, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord.”

I will not, however, pursue this line of thought any further now. Let us pass for a moment to the Psalmist's view of the men whom he calls the “ungodly.” It is explained in those two verses which I have chosen for a text: “The ungodly is so proud that he careth not for God: neither is God in all his thoughts.” “The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

Let us notice that he does not bring against the ungodly any charge of theoretical atheism. He is dealing with practical as distinct from theoretical atheism, and, therefore, it is, that his words have an interest for ourselves. For with theoretical or philosophical atheism the Bible concerns itself very little. It is a very significant fact that the most religious book in the world makes no effort whatever

to prove the existence of God. It indulges in none of the elaborate reasonings with which we are familiar in certain kinds of literature. Nor need we concern ourselves very much about theoretical atheism, for two reasons : because, at the present time, there are practically no people of any consequence in the whole country who call themselves atheists, and because even if a person calls himself an atheist, it does not in the least follow that he is one. For if any one, calling himself an atheist, has any care for the difference between right and wrong, or any passion for righteousness, that man is really committed to a spiritual interpretation of life—and, though he knows it not, has some faith in a true and righteous Power—whilst on the other hand, practical atheism may sometimes be found in Church. For the practical atheist is he who says, not in his speech, not in book or pamphlet, but in his *heart*,—"There is no God ;" one of whom it may be said in other words of the Psalmist—"neither is God in all his thoughts." He may be utterly opposed to theoretical atheism, but his God either lives in some distant heaven, "far away out of his sight," or He is a God who practically does nothing, of whom it may be said, "Tush, God hath forgotten ; He hideth away His face, and He will never see it."

And the great question for us is really not whether we confess the existence of a God or not

—that may matter little to us, still less, perhaps, to God—but how far our belief in Him plays an active and practical part in our lives. Do we, for instance, believe in spiritual more than in material forces? “Ye cannot,” says our Lord, “ye cannot,”—He does not say ye “shall not,”—but “ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” Do we, as a practical creed in our present time believe more in the power of God or the power of gold? Do we in our political relations believe more in the right cause or brute force? or do we say—and this, remember, is the most atheistical thing we can say—far more atheistical than denying the creed—that “God is on the side of the big battalions”?

Let us notice for a moment the force of that expression, “The ungodly is so proud that he careth not for God, neither is God in all his thoughts.” The ungodly is so *proud*. When Holy Scripture paints us the picture of an atheist, it is not the picture of a person in his study inventing arguments against God’s existence, but rather that of a severely practical person, with plenty of gods of his own, whose only real faith is in material force. Do you remember the picture of the Rab-shakeh—the Assyrian Captain—in the book of Kings? There are few more striking figures in all the pages of the Bible. There are two men standing in contrast one to another. On the one side is Isaiah, the prophet, in the beleagured

Jerusalem, putting faith in the unseen spiritual power—bidding the people set their confidence there—not in shifty alliances with Egypt or anything else. On the other hand is this Rabshakeh, the Assyrian Captain, passing through the country subduing, destroying, with all his army at his back. He laughs to scorn all the spiritual forces in which the people trust. "Where are the gods of Hamath and of Arpad ; where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivah ?" He has a contempt for them all—poor painted gods ! There is one thing he believes in, the Assyrian gold, the Assyrian power, the Assyrian armaments. That is his real religion. He has other gods in whose temples he bows, and whom he brings out on state occasions ; but in his heart he "careth not for God, neither is God in all his thoughts."

We know how across the stage of history those tremendous and portentous figures—Napoleon's and others—have stridden—setting at defiance all spiritual power ; saying in their hearts "There is no God," but indeed this practical materialism is not confined to them. It is found in lowly places and among quite ordinary men. It is this kind of atheism which has been described in the words of a modern poet¹ who painted for us a picture of the practical, as distinct from the theoretical atheist, in words which may be worth quoting—

¹ A. H. Clough.

“ ‘There is no God,’ the wicked saith,
‘And truly it’s a blessing,
For what He might have done with us
It’s better only guessing.’

‘There is no God,’ a youngster thinks,
‘Or really, if there may be,
He really did not mean a man
Always to be a baby.’

‘There is no God, or if there is,’
The tradesman thinks, ‘’twere funny
If He should take it ill of me
To make a little money.’

‘Whether there be,’ the rich man says,
‘It matters very little,
For I and mine, thank somebody,
Are not in want of victual.’”

And so the real question for us is just this—what is our real practical working religion? What do we believe in *most*? God or Mammon? fear *most*, poverty or wrong? Which is our hell, dread of sin, or dread of ‘not getting on’? What do we love *most*? worldly power, comfort, success, or purity, righteousness, truth? It is in some such ways as this that we shall find out whether we are atheists or not. Do we really believe in God—the living Force of righteousness, truth and love—or in something else? What is the great reality? It is something that concerns all of us. It is a question for every girl in the midst of a London season.

Do you believe in God enough to save you from a loveless marriage for the sake of wealth or position? It is the question for the man of business. Do you believe in God enough to preserve you from dishonour, even at the cost of financial ruin? what is your real religion? where is your genuine worship—in Church or the Stock Exchange? When the temptation comes, the choice between right and might—which goes to the wall—the Apostles' Creed or your own interests? For it is when a man deliberately chooses the wrong part that either "God is not in all his thoughts" or he says in his heart "There is no God."

My brethren, this is really a pressing question—How far do you truly believe in God more than all that you can see and touch? How far is He in your thoughts? How far does He rule your lives? How far does He play a part in your affairs? It is a question which men will not always find it easy to answer when they are honest with themselves; but let us just remember this, that the real answer depends very much, first, on our *prayers*. There is a saying in the Psalter, "I will set God always before me." That is what prayer does if it does anything at all. It sets us in His presence; it saves us from leaving Him entirely out of our calculations. Do you remember the son in the parable? "He went into a far country." "*Regio longinqua est oblivio Dei*," "The far country is

forgetfulness of God,"—that state in which sin becomes easy and natural, and the first step to that far country is neglect of prayer. And, again, it depends on the state of our hearts and lives. If it is true that our lives depend on belief in God, it is equally true that belief in God depends on our lives. True faith is something very different from intellectual ascent. "Selfish affections, impure imaginations, relaxed duties, will speedily penetrate the whole nature with the cancer of unbelief."¹ But every one who is true to the highest light that he knows will find, sooner or later, that the light which he sees is the light of God. There is a deep saying of St. John which we should consider well. "He that is loving knoweth God; for God is Love." We might almost venture to expand it. "He that is righteous knoweth God, for God is righteousness." "He that is pure knoweth God, for God is purity," or, as our Lord has put it, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." There is a divine revelation which is deeper than any arguments—it is the revelation of the pure and righteous and living God, to all those who are righteous, loving, and pure.

¹ Bishop Phillips Brooks.

XVI

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.”—ST. JOHN xvi. 12-14.

THERE is a strong tendency, which exists in many minds, to be ever looking backward. There are those, for instance, who are always looking back to their own childhood. They believe that they were nearer God before “the shades of the prison-house began to close upon the growing boy.” It lies for them, far back in the distance, wrapped in a mystic haze. Oh that once more they could be as they have been; that once more they could see the world “apparelled in celestial light”! They know what they have lost; they do not know, or do not realize, what they have gained since then. In a similar way, if one may venture on the

comparison, there are some Christians who look back, with a long-drawn sigh of regret, to the childhood of Christianity; to the glory and the beauty of those scenes, for instance, which are painted for us in the Gospels. Certainly the world has seen no pictures more lovely than some of those which those early painters left us—the manger-bed of Bethlehem, “with the oxen standing by”: the idyllic days in Galilee, when Christ stood in the synagogue of Nazareth, or among the lilies of the Galilean lake; when He spoke the parable of the “Sower,” or the “Good Samaritan”; when He wandered with His disciples through the corn-fields. . . . It is such an easy thing to contrast with these scenes the awful struggles and manifold failures of the Christian Church; its failures in faith or charity; its fierce disputes—or the commonplace lives and conventional religion of the great mass of those who claim the Christian name to-day. “It is a pity,” they say, “that we cannot go back to one of the days of the Son of Man.”

And there are some who, in a temper of this kind, wish to disentangle or discover what they call “primitive Christianity,” or the “Christianity of Christ,” and bid men throw off all later accretions or additions; they would abjure all theological systems as, in a larger or lesser measure, corruptions of the truth. The path of safety lies

in going backwards. I think that we have often heard language of this kind, but it is not the language of Christ Himself. He might, no doubt, have left behind Him an iron system, from which no variation was possible. He might have left rules and regulations and said, "To depart from these is to depart from truth." He might have left a formal creed, or a complete, minute, and final ethical code. But He did nothing of the kind, and had He done so, it is safe to say that Christianity would have been merely a local limited religion. But He intended something very different from that. It was not to be for a few years, but for all time. It was to supply not dead rules, but life-giving principles. It was to be not stationary but progressive. It was to be not a finished system, but a continuous growth. And when we look back to the days of the Son of Man—or to times of primitive Christianity—when we try to draw a line at the days of the Apostles—or of the sixth century, or the sixteenth century—we seem to hear Him criticizing our efforts in such words as those of the text, "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all the truth. . . . He shall declare unto you things to come. . . . He shall take of mine and shall show it unto you."

The vision which these words open out is, indeed, a very large one ; and all I can do this

morning is to indicate, as briefly as possible, some of the principles which seem to underlie them. (1) In the first place, we are led to expect and hope for a gradual unfolding or interpretation of truth. "He shall guide you into all the truth" (R.V.). These words are further explained by some which follow them: "He shall take of mine and show it unto you." In other words, Christ left to the world a mine of truth, if one may use the metaphor, from which generation after generation, under the guidance of the Spirit, was to hew out fresh portions for itself. He left the gold which the Church was to extract and convert into current coin. To complain, as some have done, that some of the phrases and expressions of later theology are not actually to be found in any of Christ's recorded words, is like complaining that the current coins of the realm are different in form and appearance from the nugget which first meets the miner's eye. Certainly they are different; but they are different simply because they are intended for social use, and not merely to exercise individual ingenuity. Now, what the current coin is to the primitive gold of the mine, so are the dogmas of the Church to the primitive Christian revelation. They convert it into public and social use. They make it of service, not to a few individuals but to the whole race of Christians, men and women, who cannot all labour at the mine. We should do

very ill, we should be very foolish or very vain if we affected to despise those great Christian dogmas which have been wrought out, as it were, by the pains and prayers of many generations, and which have been for so many centuries current in the Church—which have been used and handled by generations of men and women and found by their spiritual experience not to be light or worthless. But while we fully and gladly admit these great truths, let us not rush to the other extreme ; let us not hastily suppose that the mine of Christian truth is now exhausted ; that there is no more to be won by the labourers of our own day. The words of a Puritan preacher of the seventeenth century, wiser herein than most of his fellows, may well occur to us, when, speaking of the Bible, he said, “I doubt not that more light shall yet break forth from its pages.” These words may well be a warning to us while cherishing the sacred result of past labours of the Church, not to suppose that any past system is final or complete. For the Spirit is guiding and shall still guide men into the truth—the inexhaustible mine which no generation can ever wholly work out. There is no finality here. Doubtless to many this is an unwelcome fact. They want truth settled, limited, defined once and for ever ; they sigh for an infallible Church to say, “*This* is the whole truth ; there is no more.” But Christ has not provided this ; He *has* provided

the guidance of the Spirit, who shall lead the Church into a deeper knowledge of *the* truth, while He proclaimed, even as He has said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." These are great words, the meaning of which each generation must learn for itself.

(2) But this leads us one step further. The special work of the Spirit is, as He tells us, to glorify Christ. "He shall glorify me, for He shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you." And is not this, in effect, what the Spirit has ever been doing? What is the whole history of the Church but a history of the glorifying of Christ? Here, again, how limited and imperfect is the view of those who set themselves to reconstruct the surroundings of Christ's early life, or to find out what the earlier disciples thought of Him. It was impossible for Christ's contemporaries or His immediate disciples to understand Him or to "glorify" Him while He was still with them in the flesh. As He Himself said, "It was expedient that He should go away." Take two or three instances of what I mean. There was the Birth at Bethlehem. All that men saw or could see was "a child lying in the manger"; a peasant-mother, with a carpenter at her side. Take the scene on Calvary; what could be seen there but one more victim to a careless ruler or a cruel multitude? a man crucified

between two thieves, and with no kind of splendour lighting up the cross on which he lay? Or what, again, did the Last Supper present to the eye but the spectacle of a man eating the Passover with his friends, pledging them to remember him in days to come, as he exhibited the symbols of his sacrifice—of the body which was to be broken, of the blood which should be outpoured?

And surely it has been the work of the Spirit, guiding the Church to “glorify” all these things for us. There is a glory over the manger-bed of Bethlehem because we have been guided into the truth that this was the very Incarnation of the Son of God; that this was a new beginning for humanity; that here, in this lowly form, was the germ of all true brotherhood—in this revelation of the love and fatherhood of God. There is a glory on the Cross. We set it on the summits of our churches, or on the crowns of kings, because the Spirit has showed it to us, not as the gallows of a slave, but as the very instrument of the redemption of the world. It is the glory of the Atonement—of the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world—it is the glory which has shone on the upturned faces and tearful eyes of the great multitude of penitents who have turned to it for forgiveness and for rest. This is the Spirit glorifying the Cross of Christ.

There is a glory on the upper chamber at Jerusalem. The Church has never been content to see in the Eucharist only a commemorative feast, because the Spirit has taken of the bread and wine, and "shown" them unto us as the very Body and Blood of Christ—we know not how—in some manner mysterious and ineffable—the very pledge and instrument of the great communion of believing souls with Christ Himself—the centre of unity and fellowship—the perpetual representation of the atoning sacrifice. It is the Spirit, as we believe, who thus takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto men ; and who glorifies Christ by guiding the thoughts of men into a deeper appreciation of the meaning and mystery of His life and words and acts. . . . And if every age has seen, as surely it has seen, new meaning and new glories in Bethlehem and Calvary and the Sacraments of the Gospel, is not this the very process of which Christ spoke when He said, "He shall lead you into all the truth? He shall glorify me, for He shall take of mine and show it unto you?"

(3) And so, once more, in conclusion, Whitsunday comes to us as a festival of hope. It bids us look forward, not backward. As we have said already, there are always those whose golden age lies in the past. They speak of the "old saints," the "ages of faith," and so on. "The old saints"

—yes; we must never forget them; but let them lift up their eyes round about, and perhaps they will discover that there are some saints—living saints in the world to-day. And if there have been “ages of faith” and “triumphs of faith” in the past, are there none to-day? The Festival of the Holy Spirit is the proclamation of the great truth that God is with us to-day—that He has not withdrawn Himself from the Church; that He is guiding and will guide her into new fields and new victories. Our golden age lies not in the past but in the future—when “the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.” . . . This is the true language of faith—not, as some seem to think, a perpetual groaning over present evils, or a sentimental longing for the past. And may it not be also something of the same kind with the individual? “He shall glorify me.” “The Son,” says Bishop Westcott, “is the image of God, an image made visible, so to speak, at the Incarnation; and the Spirit enables the Christian to take this image into his soul as a transforming power.” . . . This is a work which can be done, even when “the outward man decayeth”; and those who believe in the Spirit will also believe that life may be not a descent but an ascent, not a constant falling away from primitive innocence, but progress to a higher goodness . . . and that though the youths be weary and the young

men faint, those who “wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary” —and, last and best of all—“they shall walk and not faint.”

XVII

LOOKING HEAVENWARD¹

“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?”
—ACTS i. 11.

“But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God.”—ACTS vii. 55.

“WHY stand ye gazing up into heaven?” Such was the question addressed to the disciples who were parting from their Lord. That event which we call the “Ascension” was the last of the appearances of the Risen Lord. His whole Life, after the Resurrection, belonged to the spiritual and eternal world. . . . “Touch me not,” He had said to Mary Magdalene, “for I am ascending,” and the particular appearance which we call the “Ascension” took, we may venture to believe, its particular form and character, for this reason, that it might be recognized as the final appearance of Christ to the eyes of His disciples. In one sense, no doubt, the Ascension must have been a deep

¹ Preached on the Sunday after Ascension Day.

disappointment. It shattered at once and for ever the dream which they had so long indulged of an earthly sovereignty, the restored Kingdom of Israel. It shifted, so to speak, the centre of their hope and interests. It showed them in a dramatic manner that the Kingdom was not of this world : that if they had known Christ after the flesh, henceforth they should know Him so no more. Such thoughts may have flashed upon them, yet it is no wonder if they were for the moment dazed, stunned, confused. . . . So they stand gazing upwards ; they too, perhaps, felt themselves to be parting from the common earth around, and where their treasure was there would their hearts be also. Then it was that the awful silence was broken by the angel's voice : " Ye men of Galilee,"—was the mention of Galilee intended to remind these dreamers of their own familiar fields?—" Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? " And the meaning was not lost or misunderstood. They returned to Jerusalem ; and there, in the temple and amongst the streets which they knew so well, they went to the work which God had given them to do.

" Why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? " The question is, perhaps, not so much one for our own age, as for some of the ages which have passed away. There have been times when the Church has stood so " gazing up into heaven," that it has

been in danger of forgetting the fields of Galilee, or the streets of Jerusalem. It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to remind you in what various ways this tendency has been manifested. We think, naturally, in the first place, of all the phenomena of monasticism. What was monasticism, in theory at any rate, but a constant "gazing up into heaven"? Men despaired of the frivolous, fighting, suffering, unsanctified world all around about them, and deliberately turned their backs upon it. They sought to forget it, to forget the perishing things of earth altogether. They devoted, or sought to devote, themselves to almost continuous prayer—those exercises of devotion which appal us to-day by their length and repetitions. Monasticism did considerable service to the world in its day: it was a strong witness to the unseen which impressed the imagination of rude ages, and incidentally it preserved the dying embers of culture and learning: but its object was not to do service to the world, but to forget it; it was to save the souls of its own adherents and to fix their eyes on heaven. Or, again, there have been times in which religious "speculation" of one sort or another has absorbed the best energies of the strongest minds. It is difficult for us Englishmen, priding ourselves on what we call practical, to understand or appreciate the passionate interest of the Greek intellect in theological subtleties. We can understand nations

fighting for the markets of the world, we cannot understand them contending about the "Filioque" in the Creed. It is a sign of our limitations and not, as we are apt to think, of our perfection that we find nothing but a "weariness of the flesh" in all these questions debated for so many centuries with such fervour of feeling and keenness of intellect, about the relations of the Persons in the Blessed Trinity, or the Divine and Human Nature of our Lord. These questions had to be fought out if Christianity was to be more than mere enthusiasm; and yet we must confess that again and again the exclusive importance attached to them has produced almost a contempt of the plain and homely Christian duties which lay at the feet of men. Or, we may think again of all the time that has been spent on speculating on the unseen world, or the nature and condition of the future life; of the passionate desire to behold more than God has seen fit to show. Men have engaged themselves in numbering the angels; in setting them in ranks and orders; thrones, dominions, powers; but they have not always seen Lazarus at their gates. Even now there are many to whom there is an unhealthy fascination in the endeavour to force the gates of the grave and look upon the life beyond: a fascination by no means confined to those who hold the Christian faith. Nor are there wanting those who endeavour to meet this

desire. The history of the Church is full of apocalyptic literature which has professed to reveal the unseen world and to show things to come. Yet these gazers into heaven have, as a rule, but built castles in the air.

Or, once more, there are all the phenomena of what is called mysticism. Far be it from us to speak a disparaging word of "mystics." Some of the greatest men and women have been "mystics": and the life, for that matter, of a St. Theresa is sufficient to show us that mysticism is by no means incompatible with an attention to the practical duties and charities of this life. Yet, on the other hand, there is a mysticism which has profited little. What a difference, for instance, there is between the aim of the Oriental devotee to forget himself and all men in the mystic contemplation of God—to lose his own consciousness in the ocean of the Infinite Being—and the life of Christ, who "went about doing good!" He did not forget the world of men and women all about Him "while gazing up into heaven."

All these tendencies, then, there have been—and sometimes they still are visible; but can we say that for most of us, at the present time, the danger lies in this particular direction? Surely the great mark of our own age—I am speaking now of all that we mean by Western civilization—surely *the* mark of our age is that it is what we call *secular*. It

is, that is, an age which is almost entirely, or very largely, interested in the present and visible world. And this is not by itself at all surprising. For that which distinguishes our time from all the times preceding is the extraordinary progress of physical science. It has been, and is, the business of science to reveal the wonders of "Nature." It brings to light forces which have been hidden from the eyes of all previous generations—hidden, we might almost say, from the "foundation of the world." We all know what science has done, what it can do. How startling and splendid are its triumphs! How calmly and majestically it goes from strength to strength! How much it achieves! How completely it has changed the aspect of the world in which we live! It is no wonder that we are dazzled by it, or that men have endeavoured on the basis of physical science to found a positive religion—a religion whose centre should be, not God, but man.

I have said that this is the object of what is called Positivism, to make not God, but man, the centre and object of religion; but might I not go farther and say that, unconsciously, this often appears to be the leading characteristic of all religion, however orthodox it may be in its creed—at the present time—so far as the majority of people are concerned? We want, we say, a "practical religion." The demand is a natural

one ; Christianity has always aimed to be a practical religion, but let us beware lest we narrow the word too rigidly. A religion which is merely practical may dwindle into a utilitarianism which ceases to be religious at all. Religion, as we see it so often now, religion has feet and hands ; but it wants eyes and wings—it wants vision and aspiration. Are there not many, for instance, by whom religion is chiefly tolerated as the support of morality ? If they could be sure that morality could be secured without it, then it might go, and none would miss it ; but they cannot be sure. There is a story of one of the leading Deists of the eighteenth century being asked why, though he never entered a church himself, he always insisted on his servants going. “ Because,” he answered, “ I do not wish to be robbed or murdered.” And that is the secret feeling of a large number of people. Religion is for them something purely earthly and utilitarian. They spend no time in “ gazing up into heaven.” So naturally the habit of public worship has declined. Church-going is indeed defended or permitted, so far as it is supposed to benefit the worshippers, to do them good, to inculcate principles of morality ; but they reject silently or scornfully the notion of worshipping with no ulterior aim, simply to render glory, worship and praise to the Creator ; that conception of worship which is embodied for us, for instance, in the Communion

Service : "We praise Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee ; we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory."

Here is our need. Do not mistake me. I know that we cannot and should not forget the earth to which we belong. We are still "Galileans," and the claims of our own country, of our fellow-men are all about us. Of course Christianity must be a practical thing ; we distrust any religion which is suitable only for superfine saints or theologians, but not for men of the world. Christianity is a very poor thing unless it makes men honourable in business ; unless it makes women (shall we say) pay their dressmakers' bills. All this is true, but if it only ends in being a system of utilitarian morality, it will soon cease to be of any value to the world. Men want more than this ; and if there is a wrong way of gazing up into heaven, there is also a right way—the way of a Stephen, who, "full of the Holy Ghost," looked up and beheld the "glory of God." That is, after all, the great desire of the soul—to see the glory of God ; and the great triumph of Christianity has been in this, that it has brought God nearer to men, and assured them of another world than that which they saw with their eyes and touched with their hands. And so it is that in our religion, often so good and useful, but tending to become dull and commonplace, the Feast of the Ascension comes with a great

uplifting power. It bids us lift our eyes and our hearts heavenward. It tells us that Christ has ascended into heaven, to assure us, as it were, of the reality and nearness of the unseen world; to assure us that, after all, full of interest as this world is, we are here but "strangers and pilgrims"; that "here we have no continuing city," but must "seek one to come." . . . It bids us, like Stephen, look up into heaven, and see the glory of God. We must look up in the midst of our common duties; for we shall do them not worse but better if we can do them with a Divine vision in our own eyes; if a light from heaven can shine upon the "daily round and common task." We must look up in our sorrows and trials, our pains and our losses; for here the religion of earth cannot help us; nothing less than the love of God can heal the stricken soul; life at times is only tolerable for those who can lift eyes that are strained by suffering or dim with tears, to the splendour of a Beatific Vision. We must look up, finally, like Stephen, in the hour of death: that inevitable hour which—though modern science may add a few more years to our sojourn here—must dawn at last; that hour before which our "ethical systems" stand hopeless and helpless, and when only men and women "full of the Holy Ghost" can see beyond the mist and darkness some glimpse of the glory of God. . . . Oh, my friends, this is the lesson of the Ascensiontide!

Sursum corda ! Lift up your hearts . . . and this must be our prayer, that "God, the King of Glory, who has exalted His only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph into His Kingdom in heaven, may not leave us comfortless, but may send to us the Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before."

XVIII

SERVING ONE'S GENERATION

“For David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God, fell on sleep.”—ACTS xiii. 36.

It is, I think, quite permissible to tear these words from their context. In their original application they form, as you may remember, part of an argument used by St. Paul in the synagogue of Antioch. They suggest to him a great contrast between the patriarch and the Redeemer. St. Paul is dealing with the Resurrection, and speaking to Jews he loves, after his own fashion, becoming “all things to all men” to appeal to the scriptures, whose authority they recognized. He is quoting the words of an old psalm, “Thou shalt not leave my soul in hell, neither shalt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.” Obviously, he declares, these words cannot apply to the Psalmist himself. “For David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God fell on sleep ; but he whom God raised again saw no corruption : be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren,

that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."

We will not this morning concern ourselves with the argument of the apostle, but will fasten our thoughts on the words of the text: "For David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God, fell on sleep." These words are true of a great many people besides David, and therefore it is that they especially appeal to us. For they do not suggest anything very wonderful or extraordinary. They set before us an ideal—an ideal which a large number of obscure and commonplace people have kept before themselves, and in a more or less perfect fashion have tried to follow—an ideal of service or ministry—of making life something more than a scheme of self-aggrandizement or self-indulgence. It is an ideal which is expressed, as many of you will remember, in the "bidding prayer" of the University of Oxford—in words heard by some at least of those who are about to pass from the University into the larger field of the world—that in our ancient seats of learning there may not be wanting a supply of men "duly qualified to serve God in Church and State." And, perhaps, we may say, that such words as these have expressed what has been, consciously or unconsciously in days gone by, the source of all that has been best in the lives of those who have borne without reproach "the good old name of gentleman."

And how far, we may ask, is such an ideal operative at the present day—"to serve God in Church and State?" And first, *in Church*. It is impossible for us to utter these words without pausing for an instant to consider and draw your attention to what I am bound to consider a significant and melancholy phenomenon of the present day, viz. the great and ever increasing decline in the number of candidates for Holy Orders. The older Universities which once supplied almost the whole body of the clergy now contribute, I believe, only about one-half of the total. What is the reason of this decline? In part, I have no doubt, it may be attributed to those perplexities of faith, that widespread unsettlement of ancient religious opinion which is characteristic of our day. Of course, it is not only characteristic of our day; there have been other times of rapid change and transition when, to anxious minds, the "foundations of the earth have been out of course;" when things have been "shaken, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain." But when these times come—when change is all about us—it is, perhaps, not wonderful that young and ardent spirits should declare in the words of the sons of the prophets in Elisha's time, "The place where we dwell is too strait for us." It is felt, and I think that the feeling is a natural one, that theology, like other sciences, must be progressive, and that

the English Church seems, at least, to tie her clergy too closely to the formulas of a past age. The Thirty-nine Articles, for instance, appear at any rate to bind them to what is, after all, a body of sixteenth-century divinity, and there is a natural feeling that, consistently with a loyal adherence to the great essential truths of the Faith, the Church should try to find out, not how many she can exclude by raising barriers, but how many she can include by opening, as widely as possible, the doors of the Christian ministry. So, again, there is the undeniable fact that, as there has been no revision of the Prayer Book for two hundred and fifty years, it is filled with rubrics and directions which are practically impossible to be obeyed, and which sometimes are an obstacle to the Church adapting herself to the needs and requirements of the present age. It is, perhaps, known to you that at the present time the Convocations of the Church in obedience to the "letters of business" recently issued by the Crown, are engaged in nothing less than the task of revising the Prayer Book. It is an important work, which will occupy many years ; and I, for one, can only earnestly hope that it may result in the removal of some of the barriers which undoubtedly at the present time deter many, otherwise well qualified, from offering themselves as candidates for Holy Orders.

But it would be absurd to suppose that the

reason of the present decline is exclusively intellectual; we may also discern the working of quite another set of causes. There can, I think, be little doubt that one prominent feature of our modern life is an increasing appetite for luxury and excitement. There is no country (except America) in which poverty is so much dreaded and despised as in England. The standards of comfort have become, within the last quarter of a century, immensely elevated. This, of course, is not necessarily in itself a bad sign. There are a vast number of people in this country whose standards of comfort are by no means too high, but when the desire to "make money" becomes, very largely, the mainspring of life, it is no wonder that the ministry of the Church is looked at askance. For the undeniable fact remains that for the great body of the clergy there is no reasonable expectation of any lot but poverty, and sometimes poverty to a distressing degree. When we remember, for instance, the fact that many of the "livings" (so called) of the English Church are under £200, not a few under £100 a year, it needs, we must admit, some faith and courage to enter upon a career that, from a financial point of view, is one of very little promise.

But, oh! surely one has a right to look to youth not to be too prudent and cautious. It is no good sign that the prospect of serving God and one's

generation "in Church," even though it may be in the obscure ministry of a country parish, seems to have so little attraction. As we look back on the history of this country, we shall not, I am sure, be inclined to deny that England owes a great deal to those country clergy of whom it is now the fashion to speak in such disparaging terms. From the country parsonage, as any one can see who examines the "Dictionary of National Biography," has issued a far larger proportion of distinguished men than from any other source. What Sydney Smith called the children "reared on catechism and bread and butter," have learned there to face the difficulties of life, not enfeebled by any enervating luxury, and with, at least, a high sense of duty in their hearts—"the duty towards God," "the duty towards their neighbours"—and whatever may have been the faults of the clergy of which we hear so much, their "narrowness" or "obscurantism," they have certainly contributed to the national life elements which it could ill afford to lose. I appeal to those of you who are parents not, at any rate, to refuse your children to the ministry of the Church; not to teach them to be over-prudent. There are worse things in the world than poverty; and, though of course, we may turn, and I think ought to turn, to other ranks of society and welcome from them recruits for the priesthood—for if Christ called peasants and fishermen to the Apostolic

dignity, who are we that we should insist on a class ministry?—yet, at the same time, I do feel that if the upper classes discourage their children from devoting themselves to the Church's ministry, they are doing them and their country a bad service.

But, of course, I would not for a moment speak as if the Church offered the only means by which men may serve "their generation." There are other ministries which are quite as "holy" as that of the priesthood, and where the opportunities of usefulness and public spirited work are by no means less, and may indeed easily be more. It is impossible, and would be unnecessary to name all these forms of activity to-day, but one or two will easily occur to us. There are, for instance, all the opportunities of ministry which are included under the name of the "civil service." There is nothing more important for a country than that its civil service, at home or abroad, should be inspired by high ideals, and there is, I believe, none inspired by higher than those of this country. Most Englishmen resent the charge of acting from any very high or disinterested motives, and we are glad that they do so, but there is, I think, nothing more admirable than the way in which, sustained by a lofty sense of duty, our civil servants in various parts of the world are helping to build up better societies. When we consider, for instance, the

work that has been done for the last twenty years in Egypt, the patience and firmness with which men—using no inflated language—putting aside the temptation to enrich themselves—have been slowly bringing “cosmos” out of “chaos,” and have been gradually redeeming and inspiring hope and courage into a class of beings who have known nothing better than a rule of tyranny and oppression, we can feel that this is a page of duty of which we may be justly proud. And this work has been done mainly by men whom we call “officials”—a name which by many is supposed to connote all that is “hard and dry.” The officials come and go. Their names are for the most part forgotten. But their work remains long after they themselves have “served their generation” and “fallen on sleep.”

I have mentioned two classes of men this morning, but, in truth, the particular work does not matter very much. The great question is—What is the spirit that inspires it? Do we really want to serve our generation? Is this the *first* thing and the reward *second*? This is the great question. The reward is necessary, and we need not affect to despise it; but the life inspired by the ideal of service stands in sharp contrast to that which is primarily devoted to the accumulation of a fortune. The work must be first; the reward second. When the order is inverted, and the first aim to make

money, by speculation or any other short cut, then we have the degradation of life. Few people, I think, will deny that there *is* such a danger in society at the present time. It is not a matter on which I can pretend to be a competent judge ; but those whose judgment I trust, and who speak from a long intimate acquaintance with what is called, and calls itself, "society," tell me that it is the appetite for money, and luxury, and the social respect which is at once accorded to all who have money, irrespective of any personal considerations, which is one of the most distressing and disgusting symptoms of the present day. No one will long respect an aristocracy which is distinguished mainly by excess of luxury and madness of self-indulgence ; if it is to live at all, in a critical and somewhat revolutionary age, it can only live by "serving its generation" in the particular manner in which a generation can be served by those who have behind them certain traditions of high spirit and fine honour ; those to whom much has been committed and from whom much will be required.

That there are still many who keep this ideal before them is happily true ; for indeed it is in those dutiful and serviceable lives that the true strength of a nation depends. They need not be showy or brilliant. They need only do the task that lies before them. Every one will remember Tennyson's picture of the country squire—the man

whom the young lover in his ardour and impatience had despised as a dull clod, with no living fire, but of whom, after many years, he formed such a different estimate—

“ . . . You, my Leonard, use and not abuse your day,
Move among your people, know them, follow him who
led the way,
Strove for sixty widowed years to help his homelier brother
men,
Served the poor, and built the cottage, raised the school,
and drained the fen.

“ Hears he now the voice that wronged him? Who shall
say it cannot be?
Earth would never touch her worst were one in fifty such
as he.”

It is, surely, good for us to remember, at times, the lives of those who leaving no resounding names behind them, have in such ways as these “served their generation,” before “they fell on sleep.” It is only a few years that are given to any of us, but we can do something in those few years to “serve our generation,” and then we too shall pass away; yet something of us will remain. That, perhaps, was the lesson which was brought home, most of all, to those of us who in the last few days watched the pageant at Oxford. We saw there, before our eyes, one generation after another coming and going; the individuals passed; but the drama went on. At last there came the scene where all

the actors of the various ages came together, as for the judgment of God, and passed over the bridge, melting, like the baseless fabric of a vision, with the words upon their lips—

“Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away ;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.”

They fly, forgotten ; but their work, or some portion of it remains, and in the words of George Eliot, “that things are not so bad for you and me as they might have been, is partly due to those who have led hidden lives, and rest in unvisited tombs.”

THE END

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